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Identity at a Crossroads

Mimicry and Resistance in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality*

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tutkielma tarkastelee matkimisen (eng. mimicry) käsitettä V.S. Naipaulin romaanissa *The Mimic Men* ja Neil Bissoondathin romaanissa *A Casual Brutality*. Edward Saidin, Homi Bhabhan ja Franz Fanonin ajatuksiin nojautuen tutkielma pohtii ja vertailee matkimisen vaikutuksia romaanien päähenkilöihin, heidän ihmissuhteisiinsa sekä heidän kuvailemiinsa fiktiivisiin saarivaltioihin. Tarkastelun kohteena on myös päähenkilöiden kasvaminen tietoisuuteen matkimisestaan sekä matkimisen käsitteen hyödyllisyys ja merkityksellisyys postkolonialistisen kirjallisuuden tutkimisessa.

Tutkielman ensimmäisessä osassa havainnoidaan matkimisen käsitettä yllä mainituissa romaaneissa temaattisesti koulutuksen, sukupuolen ja kansakunnan näkökulmista. Koulutusta käsittelevässä osiossa osoitetaan, kuinka päähenkilöt kasvavat matkimisen psykologiaan ja ns. orientaaliseen maailmankuvaan. Sukupuolta käsittelevässä osiossa pohditaan matkimisen vaikutusta päähenkilöiden avioliittoihin. Päähenkilöiden vaimojen esitetään olevan matkijoita tavalla, joka muuttaa yleisimpiä käsityksiä matkimisesta postkolonialistisessa kontekstissa. Lopuksi esitetään matkimisen psykologian vaikuttavan romaanien fiktiivisiin saarivaltioihin hyvin samankaltaisesti, mikä tarjoaa näköalapaikan tarkastella matkimisen psykologian vaikutuksia pieneen Trinidadin kaltaiseen saarivaltioon 1930-luvulta 1980-luvun alkuun.

Tutkielman toinen osa tarkastelee päähenkilöiden kasvamista tietoisuuteen omasta matkimisestaan muistelmiaan kirjoittaessaan. Tämän jälkeen pohditaan matkimisen käsitettä postkolonialistisessa kontekstissa yleisemmin, mm. käsitteen määrittelyn ongelmakohtia, käsitteen taipumusta kielteisyyteen sekä käsitteen relevanssia nykypäivän globaalissa maailmassa. Esitetään myös, että käsitteen laajentaminen uusiin kategorioihin kuten sukupuolen tarkasteluun tarjoaa uusia näkökulmia postkolonialistisen kirjallisuuden tutkimukseen.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
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Colonialism is first of all a matter of consciousness.
— Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*

Abbreviations used: MM (*The Mimic Men*)
CB (*A Casual Brutality*)

1. Introduction

A journey back in time. This thesis is not just a rekindling of a first encounter with postcolonial studies begun, and left uncompleted, during my master's seminar almost two decades ago, but also a journey back to my childhood in the Philippines – as Naipaul's and Bissoondath's novels, although set in a different hemisphere, resonate very much with my own experience. This is especially so with regard to Bissoondath, as his novel's setting, the fictional island of Casaquemada that is modelled on Trinidad, matches the time of my own childhood, thereby conjuring up familiar colonial themes and conceits.

Thus, even though I am a Finn and Naipaul's and Bissoondath's protagonists are from an island modelled on Trinidad, we share the same concerns, at times equally perplexing, at times equally alienating. There is, for example, the fact of growing up within a privileged enclave and living a life separate from the everyday concerns of most of the population. There is the fact of receiving a Western education that essentially draws on elsewhere than the local, which can be generalized as the internalisation of colonial values, where the imported is always valued more than the local. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the tacit understanding that life in a peripheral island is a precarious affair, and that one's future lies elsewhere.

In many respects such concerns remain relevant in our time. We continue to make valuations privileging the core over the periphery, which, without closer examination, we regard to be real or matters of fact, in other words, naturalized conceits. In postcolonial theory such valuations and their impact on the individual and society are typically addressed under the rubric of mimicry, which, as a first approximation I define here as the impact on a colonial when receiving a Western education and the adoption of Western values as a result.

And so, after a traumatic event that takes his wife and son, Raj Ramsingh, the protagonist of Bissoondath's novel steps aboard a plane bound for Toronto and puts pen to paper in order to make sense of his self and past. Naipaul's protagonist, too, after having been ousted from ministerial position in government, starts to write in a hotel in the outskirts of London. They are seeking answers to the loss and recovery of self that is the result of growing up and being acculturated into a colonized mind. I follow them along this journey as I complete my own Western education, and make the thesis that our protagonists, in narrating their pasts, become aware of their mimic condition as they gain identities that question the colonial order.

The Mimic Men and *A Casual Brutality*: A Synopsis

V.S. Naipaul (b. 1932) and Neil Bissoondath (b. 1955) are two Trinidadian writers who are connected by a common heritage. They are both descendants of indentured labourers from India, with Naipaul also being Bissoondath's uncle. Naipaul established himself in London after graduation from Oxford, where he was to go on to establish a prolific writing career that has combined autobiography, travel writing and postcolonial critique into an oeuvre that earned him the Nobel Prize in literature in 2001. Bissoondath, who after university in Toronto has established himself in Quebec, has also enjoyed a successful writing career that, like Naipaul's, is deeply concerned with postcolonial themes.

In *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality*, Naipaul and Bissoondath go back to their roots in Trinidad, with Naipaul's novel set in the 1930s-1960s, and Bissoondath in the 1950s-1980s, collectively covering the period of colonial rule through the transition to independence and beyond. Although on the surface the two protagonists are very different – Naipaul's Ralph Singh is a man of action, with a penchant for vanity and showmanship; Bissoondath's Raj Ramsingh is cerebral and largely withdrawn– the two map out very similar lives.

In the novels, Naipaul's Ralph and Bissoondath's Raj are both revealed as quintessential mimic men. They grow up on a fictional island, Isabella and Casaquemada respectively, both of which are clearly modelled on Trinidad, where they both receive a Western education. In school they enter a cocoon separate from the island, and learn to value everything Western over the local. Whereas Naipaul's Ralph still has some connection with the Hinduism of the island's sugar plantations, Bissoondath's Raj, who lost his father early in life, has already become alienated from this heritage and with him the displacement becomes all but complete. Already at an early age they both start to feel that the island is confining and harbour dreams of escape, with Ralph moving to London, and Raj going to Toronto to study medicine at university. Both eventually find their way back to the island, however, but for different reasons. Naipaul's Ralph, having settled into a life of drift and despair, marries a white woman and returns home to Isabella, where he succeeds first as a businessman and then cabinet minister. Bissoondath's Raj, a doctor who has become estranged from his life and wife, is lured back partly by dreams of success and partly to rekindle a sense of extended family for his son. But things ultimately fall apart. Ralph, a victim of political scheming while in London negotiating the nationalization of the sugar estates, loses power and returns again to London in voluntary exile, settling in a hotel in the outskirts of London where he writes his memoirs. Raj loses

his wife and son during a night of mayhem triggered by the economic hardship following a fall in the price of oil, and finds himself on a plane back again to Canada where he puts pen to paper. And so the protagonists begin to write, to undo the veils and make sense of what has transpired. Ralph, after close to three years in hiding, finds himself reinvigorated, envisioning a new future as a free man. Raj, in turn, recreates himself as the immigrant everyman, following his ancestors and all immigrants before him into an uncertain future, trying to make something from nothing in a future that is always uncertain.

Thematically, the tales of these protagonists thus follow a very similar pattern. In a triple move or dialectic, they move from receiving a colonized education to seeking the centre or a sense of order of the self in the West, and then unable to find it, make the move back to their home island. Their return does not bring the order they were seeking either, and Ralph, due to loss of faith or inability to act, and Raj, due to the tragic events, they once again abandon the island. Indeed, I shall argue in this thesis that it is not until this final journey, in the writing of their tales, that they begin to make full sense of their predicament, and start finding themselves. For Ralph, this self-discovery is the more profound, taking place over eighteen months of writing and contemplation, from which he emerges cleansed of his mimicry and ready to once again engage with the world. For Raj, writing his memoirs on the plane back to Toronto, the cleansing has just begun, yet as his plane lands he is ready to start anew as the quintessential immigrant everyman.

The novels have an autobiographical element. Both are set in a time and place similar to the life of their respective authors. The trajectories of character and author are also the same. Ralph in *The Mimic Men* escapes to London to study and ultimately to write just like Naipaul did, and Raj in *A Casual Brutality* similarly goes to Toronto to study like Bissoondath.

We can think of Bissoondath and Naipaul as part of a literary chain of mimic exiles with Joseph Conrad as Naipaul's most obvious predecessor. As Naipaul notes in *The Return of Eva Peron*, upon arrival in London he himself became highly conscious that Conrad "had been everywhere before me" (quoted in Bhabha, 1984, 104). Similarly, Bissoondath is very much the literary progeny of Naipaul. One cannot but detect, for example, more than a tinge of influence in Bissoondath's naming of his protagonist – Ralph Singh vs. Raj Ramsingh – and the structural and thematic parallels between *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality*. In fact, so similar are the two novels that it is useful to think of them as part of the same, one being the sequel to the other.

Ultimately, the writing of our protagonists is also very much about writing back to Empire from the protagonists' and the authors' unique vantage point as mimic men. As descendants of indentured labourers and members of a minority group, and then as mimic men, Naipaul and Bissoondath offer us a rare insight into what it means to grow up in the colonies or former colonies and the psychological impact of this on the postcolonial individual and society over a period from the 1930s all the way to the early 1980s.

The Mimic Men and *A Casual Brutality*: A Review of the Literature

Criticism of V.S. Naipaul and Neil Bissoondath has often been very polemical in nature. Although both have been lauded for the technical brilliance of their writing, the typical charges levied against them have ranged from accusations of racism and mimicry through to their supposed reinforcing of negative attitudes held by the West towards the developing world as well as their blaming the victim for the impacts of colonialism. (see e.g. Bissoondath, 1994, 154-5; Keneally, 1989; Maloff, 1967; O'Neill, 2011; Sudan, 2011; Phillips, 2001; Said, 1994, 20, 320).

Much of this criticism has been by the popular press and directed at the person rather than the work. In Naipaul's case, this is to a great extent explained by his notorious capability for being offensive and for his public abandonment of the island of his birth (French, 2008, xi-xviii). Nevertheless, as noted by Barnow (2003, 20-25), some very well-known names have been very critical of aspects of Naipaul's work, including Derek Walcott and Paul Theroux. Terry Eagleton has said of Naipaul: "Great art, dreadful politics" (quoted in French, 2008, xii). Criticism has similarly been extended to Neil Bissoondath, which is often the case with minority writes as they are often attacked for misrepresentation of their own people (Chaudhuri, 2001). In his book on multiculturalism in Canada, Bissoondath (1994) has listed some of the accusations that place him in the same camp as Naipaul: one review has the heading "Naipaul's Legacies, Continuing the Colonizers's Dirty Work" (quoted in Bissoondath, 1994, 154), while M. Nourbese Philip in "Published + Be Damned" in *Frontiers* magazine noted that authors like Naipaul and Bissoondath are "examples of writers who catapulted to fame on the savage and, at times, racist critique of the Third World" (quoted in Bissoondath, 1994, 155).

As discussed by Harney (2006, 118-165), attitudes towards Naipaul and Bissoondath have often depended on which side one represents: critics from former colonies have had a proclivity to be dismissive, while those from the West have had a more favourable view. Perhaps this division merely attests to the ambivalence inherent in the fictional characters

that Naipaul and Bissoondath create, in that they can be read to be very much mimic men on the one hand, and yet critical of the colonized mind on the other. Harney (2006, 118-165) has also observed that Naipaul and Bissoondath have nevertheless remained closely attached to their island of birth, and that Trinidadians today, having become more confident and secure in their independence, have adopted a much less combative stance towards the two writers.

Halloran (2007, 121) has noted that the polarized reception of Naipaul has at times made the interpretative process "overly complex." With regard to *The Mimic Men* in particular, Strout (2012) sees the novel as being about the "crisis of identity" (85), where "Naipaul explores the power of colonial mimicry that destroys people's past and defrauds them of their identities" (93). Boxill (1976) has argued that the novel is about the protagonist's search for and eventual achievement of order, showing "how modern man can transcend and extended by his plastic world" (19). Similarly, Greenberg (2000) sees in Naipaul's protagonist "the struggle for knowledge of self and world," which "is not a revolutionary or even barrier-breaking outcome but an honest and original cultural act that provides readers with a deep sense of the West Indian experience" (Greenberg, 229).

There are not many academic studies of *A Casual Brutality* available, but none focus in detail on the topic of mimicry. Richards (1991, 58) has argued that *A Casual Brutality* stretches realistic narrative to its limits and onwards into the postmodern. Coleman (1998) sees in the novel the protagonist's attempt at "retrospective self-examination" (102) where "the process of writing" (103) allow him to move towards "honest self-appraisal" (103). Shackleton (2014), has explored the diasporic dimensions of the novel and has argued, contra Norbese Philip's argument that Bissoondath dehistoricizes the colonial condition, that it addresses the crippling fragmentations caused by indenture and the colonial heritage. In the novel, "the 'old' world is replicated in the 'new,'" with the protagonist coming to realize his own mimicry, i.e. "that he represents the colonized mind that has internalized the values of the colonizers" (Shackleton, 76).

This thesis draws on the previous studies to form a comparative perspective on mimicry in the two novels. The emphasis will be on a psychological reading that proceeds from the acculturation into mimicry to its effects on self and relationships and finally its manifestations on the national level. It will be argued that some of the more emancipatory claims made in the literature about Naipaul's protagonist, i.e. that he is able transcend his mimicry, tend to overlook the heavy price that is paid by the mimic man in his growth into self-awareness and whether it is that easy to shake off one's mimicry and one's past.

This view is reinforced when considering the even higher price paid by Bissoondath's protagonist for his mimicry. It remains uncertain whether the protagonists will be able to take what they have learned about their past and create new ways of thinking and being.

A search of key academic databases did not locate any comparative studies on mimicry in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Neil Bisoondath's *A Casual Brutality*. Similarly, no studies on mimicry from the gender perspective were located on part of either novel, which is the topic of section 2.2. As such, this thesis contributes to the literature.

The Structure of this Thesis

This thesis investigates the interrelated themes of mimicry and resistance in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality*. The aim is to gain an understanding of what is colonial mimicry, how it affects the protagonists, their relationships and the nation in a colonial setting. In addition, it is asked if the protagonists are capable of engaging in resistance against the colonial order, and what forms, if any, this resistance takes. As my emphasis will be on the psychological and affective realms, the theory employed will draw especially on postcolonial writers of this tradition, most notably Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha. The focus will be on specific themes, i.e. education, gender, and nation, each having its own section. This is followed by a chapter discussing the growth into self-awareness of the protagonists and issues relating more broadly to the study of mimicry in a postcolonial setting.

The resistance in which our protagonists engage, most notably Ralph Singh's interlude in political activism where his speeches are like role playing and he often wonders how long his bluff can last, is not by any means overt, in contrast to the armed struggle of Franz Fanon (see Fanon, 2004), or in the romanticized nation building of Ngugi wa Thiongo (see Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986). Rather, following Homi Bhabha (1984), it will be argued that resistance arises more subtly from the condition of the mimic man himself. Being granted only a 'partial' presence by the colonizer, as someone 'almost, but not quite', the mimic man can initiate a process that reveals colonialism's double standard, where "the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms" (Bhabha 1984, 86). The primary site of resistance is therefore in writing itself, and, indeed, it will be argued that our protagonists, in narrating their pasts, become aware of their mimic condition as they gain identities that question the colonial order. As we follow the protagonists on their journey, we too as

readers learn about the complex and powerful impacts of mimicry on self and society in a colonial and postcolonial setting.

Today the West has become much more than merely a geographical term. It has transposed into the psychological – we see the West is everywhere. The colonial conceits from the time of Naipaul and Bissoondath, and indeed my own childhood, have certainly to a large extent become understood and discredited. Yet every age has its own, some of which we are fully aware of, and some of which we are only starting to recognize. Hence, I believe that a comprehensive study of mimicry, including its effects on the mimic man and culture as well as its potential for postcolonial critique and resistance, remains as important as ever. It is my hope that the study of Naipaul's and Bissoondath's novels will shed light on some of the issues involved.

2. Mimicry in *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality*

Mimicry, which was defined in the introduction as the acquisition by colonized peoples of Western values and attitudes, is a fundamental concept in postcolonial studies (Ashcroft et al, 1989, 88-91; McLeod, 2010, 61-7). It dates to the early years of the British Empire and the need of the early colonists for interpreters and other functionaries to help run the needs of a growing Empire. The most explicit statement of this policy is Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education of 1835 (see Hall, 2009; Bhabha, 1984, chap. 5). During the de-colonisation period, such servants of Empire were often referred to as the local bourgeoisie or the comprador class in line with the Marxist schematics of the time (cf. Fanon, 2004; Ngugi, 1986). It was V.S. Naipaul with the publication of *The Mimic Men* in 1967 who first popularized the use of the term 'mimic man' to describe this idea of the Westernized colonial subject. Modern theoretical study of the concept began with Franz Fanon's *Black Skin*, *White Masks* in 1952, while recent developments are associated primarily with Homi Bhabha (1984, chap. 4), who, among other characterisations, has described the mimic man as being "almost white, but not quite" (Bhabha, 86). In Bhabha's formulation, to be further elaborated in this thesis, the mimic man is the embodiment of complex psychological dynamics that arise from colonial relationships and in this way reveals the underlying 'ambivalence' or double-forked nature of colonial discourse, where the colonizer has simultaneous desire and fear of the colonized, marked by the desire to know and to reform, recognize yet disavow (Bhabha, 1984, chap. 3).

The notion of mimicry therefore stretches over a long historical period, and has equally been understood to refer to a 19th century functionary of the East India Company, or, indeed, the two protagonists studied in this thesis: Ralph Singh, the Western educated businessman and former minister, and Raj Ramsingh, the Western educated doctor, both of whom both left, returned to and finally abandoned their islands of Isabella and Casaquemada respectively. But what, more specifically, is involved in mimicry? In what ways are Raj and Ralph mimic men? And how are they affected by it? Perhaps the best place to start is by going through some basic definitions.

The OED defines mimicry as "the action, practice, or art of copying or closely imitating," or "to mime", "esp. for the purposes of ridicule or satire, or to entertain." In the biological sense, mimicry refers to the "close external resemblance of an animal or plant to another", or "camouflage" or "a similar resemblance between parts or features."

As a first indication, this definition draws attention to the binary division between the copy and the original. Hence, in the postcolonial context, as formulated for example by Bhabha (1984, chap. 4), Raj and Ralph, in being mimic men, are caught in the process of copying the Western, that is the original, and that the two protagonists are thereby 'lacking' or seeking some real or imaginary essence or being that resides exclusively in the Western subject. To the extent that mimicry is viewed as miming, the connotation is also that the colonized person lacks voice.

The division into the copy and the original also draws attention to a key fact of postcolonial thinking, whereby the human, or post-Enlightenment Man, has been split into the Western and non-Western, colonist and colonized, civilized and non-civilized, white man and native. This aspect of colonialism, as popularized in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, includes the corollary that the West is something our two protagonists should aspire to, as it is in a privileged position over, or more valued than, the local.

The definition above also introduces the possibility of mockery. Within postcolonialism this refers to how attempts by the mimic men of early Empire to copy Western habits were often viewed as mockery by their colonial masters, who thought it was akin to a travesty that the ill-educated should strive to attain something beyond their capacities (cf. Pickering, 2001). As a counter move, as argued by Bhabha (1984, chap. 4), the mocking can also contain elements of resistance, whereby the mimic man's copying of Western customs and attitudes – in being almost original, but not quite – exposes these customs and attitudes as mere constructs, or, more importantly, as instruments of colonial domination over the colonized.

Before moving on to an analysis of *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality* thematically by education, gender and nation, I shall open up some of the issues above by a reading of a key scene from each of novel. The first involves Naipaul's Ralph's recollection of his first encounter with snow as a young student in London, and the second Bissoondath's Raj's thoughts on the colonial legacy at a former imperial fort after the murder of his wife and son. Ralph's recollection is a very personal and miniscule event, while Raj's reflections address his nation's trajectory through colonial history. Taken together these scenes attest to the multifaceted manifestations of mimicry in a postcolonial setting.

Figures of Fantasy

After fourteen months of writing in a hotel in the outskirts of London, Ralph Singh, the protagonist of *The Mimic Men*, is getting close to the completion of his memoirs and starts to reflect upon the first day of his endeavour. There he had sat, he tells us, by his desk for an entire day waiting for some thought, or guiding idea, that would provide the initial impetus to his writing and spur him ahead. And then at around 4 pm, just after tea, a year and a half since arriving in the hotel, the epiphany comes to him. This is the memory of his first snow at his boarding house when he was a young student in London.

> Snow. At last; my element. And these were flakes, the airiest crushed ice. More than crushed: shivered. But the greater enchantment was the light. I went out to the dark passage and stood before the window. (MM, 8)

The vision of snow as his element, we are told, had been with Ralph since he was a young boy at school in his native island of Isabella, when during one class his Canadian teacher had started to reminisce longingly about what the snow was like back home in the Laurentians. Ralph, mesmerized by the image, decides that snow is his element too. This is a curious vision, as a gentle breeze on a tropical beach would be more likely for a boy from the West Indies, and indeed, elsewhere in the novel the local beaches are identified with feelings of confinement and shipwreck.

The scene thus reveals a privileging norm at the heart of Ralph's most intimate thoughts. Much like his first memory of school is one where he remembers taking an apple to his teacher, though the Ralph that writes his memoirs surmises that it must have been an orange because there were no apples Isabella, Ralph has come to associate things of the West as more valuable than those from his island. So powerful are these valuations that they have seeped beyond the real into the world of fantasy.

The source of these values are very much rooted in his colonial education. As noted by Ashcroft et al. (1989, 3), the education of the colonized established a "privileging norm' at the heart of English studies that in effect functioned as "a template" for the denial of the value of the "peripheral," the "marginal," and the "uncanonised." This process has been popularized by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism*, which is aptly summarized by Moore-Gilbert (1997) below:

> Orientalism… operates in the service of the West's hegemony over the East primarily by producing the East discursively as the West's inferior 'Other' – a manoeuvre which strengthens – indeed, even partially constructs – the West's self-image as a superior civilization. It does this principally by distinguishing and then essentializing the identities of East and West through a dichotomizing system of representations embodied in the regime of stereotype, with the aim of making rigid sense of difference between the European and Asiatic parts of the world. Consequently, the East is characteristically produced in Orientalist discourse as – variously – voiceless, sensual, female, despotic, irrational and backward. By contrast, the West is represented as masculine, democratic, rational, moral, dynamic and progressive. (Moore-Gilbert, 39)

Ralph's vision of snow thus draws attention to how he, as a young man, had aspired for everything Western as opposed to what his island could provide. This is manifest throughout the novel on many levels, from his meticulous use of the Queen's English over Island English, or in his fascination with the classics over island culture. More generally, this is the adoption of the Orientalist way of seeing things, where Western things and ideas, which we can think of as encompassing 'the centre,' are inherently more valued than the local, which we can think of as 'the periphery.'

At the very moment that Ralph climbs to the attic of the boarding house to see the snow, hoping for some sort of communion whereby he would finally feel that he had left his peripheral island behind and entered that very real world of the West, which in Fanon's terms is the fantasy of the native to occupy the master's place (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 46), the magic is taken away from him:

> Yet what was I to do with so complete a beauty? And looking out from that room to the thin lines of brown smoke rising from ugly chimney pots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite tremendously braced and buttressed, looking out from that empty room with the mattress on the floor, I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it. (MM, 9)

Thus, even as Ralph is rushing up the stairs, he is already starting to doubt the possibility of 'communion.' We have first the hesitation of what that experience of the snow is to offer in the first place, the experience of such complete beauty, and then once he looks out the window, we see that he can see nothing but a forlorn place, marked by memories of war and poverty and isolated lives. As it turns out, the intimation of loss that he

experiences as he gazes upon the snow is to be what defines his life for quite some time afterwards, where deep in his unconscious he feels the loss that he is yet to fully understand as a result of his growing up as a mimic man, expecting the West to offer some kind of relief or fulfilment that is not there to be had.

Ralph cannot, of course, commune with the snow like his teacher had done with the snow of his native the Laurentians because Ralph, despite all the learning about the West that he was provided in his native island of Isabella, nevertheless does not have access to the authentic cultural experience of his teacher, but merely a copy of it, imagined, in the periphery. In Homi Bhabha's terms, Ralph has been trapped into the mimic man's condition, the "subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite," or "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1984, 86), where "to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English" [emphasis omitted] (86-7):

> There in Liege in a traffic jam, on the snow slopes of the Laurentians, was the true, pure world. We, here on our island, handling books printed in this world, and using its goods, had been abandoned and forgotten. We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new. (MM,146).

In this scene of Ralph's first snow he is also returning the gaze of the colonizer. Paradoxically, in striving to leave mimicry behind and gain access to that authentic experience of the centre as something permanent or refractory, he can only discover that key motif in Naipaul's fiction "that the centre of order is the ultimate disorder" (Ashcroft et al, 1989, 90). For that experience of snow is only snow, it contains no magical powers, and as such any attempt by Western thought to empower it with some privileging essence is doomed to failure. Raj has yet to realize that there is no Western metropolis, or centre, or any other Archimedean point that can serve as a foundation for order or truth, or the essence or structure of being. As pointed out by Ashcroft et al. (1989, 91), "this perception is both the ultimate rebellion and the ultimate unveiling performed by post-colonial literature."

Yet, at this juncture, where Raj is experiencing his first snow in London, he is not yet able to make a further leap into understanding. The snowfall was a disappointment, but the quest for the 'centre' continues. In a reaction to this intimation of loss, he takes on the role of the colonial dandy, seeking escape from his feelings of forlornness in the company

of ever more debauched encounters with women. He is still to apprehend the implication of his mimicry:

> I would play with famous names as I walked empty streets and stood on bridges. But the magic of names soon faded. Here was the river, here was the bridge, there was that famous building. But the god was veiled. My incantation of names remained unanswered. In the great city, so solid in its light, which gave colour even to unrendered concrete – to me as colourless as rotting wooden fences and new corrugated-iron roofs – in this solid city life was two-dimensional. (MM, 23)

With this image the dream of finding his identity in the West, as encapsulated in the expectation of communing with the snow, and finding only the forlornness of the city, is shattered even as the journey itself has hardly begun. Yet, this first denial of access is only an intimation, and as Ralph later writes, marks the beginning of a section of his life in parenthesis, which we can interpret as a period of life in which he is very much a mimic man from which he awakes much later as a result of writing his memoirs:

> But even as I tried to put words to what I felt, I knew that my own journey, scarcely begun, had ended in the shipwreck which all my life I had sought to avoid. (MM, 10)

Relics of a Colonial Legacy

Unlike Ralph Singh of *The Mimic Men*, who laboured on his memoirs for a whole fourteen months, and who took a year and a half to start writing, Raj Ramsingh, the protagonist of *A Casual Brutality*, lives in accelerated time, writing his own story within the span of his airline flight from his island of Casaquemada to Toronto.

Raj is also narrating his story a couple of decades later than Ralph, in the early 1980s, which marks a difference in underlying mood. Thus, following the division of modernist and postmodernist fiction into epistemological and ontological poles (McHale, 1996), Naipaul's Ralph remains the modern man, still pining for an order or sense of self that could be rooted within some grander narrative, even though deep down he knows that such is no longer accessible. Bissoondath's Raj, in contrast, is on the cusp of the postmodern. He writes his memoirs in transit, foregrounding his in-betweenness, where the dominant concern has shifted from the epistemological to the ontological and the passage from world to world is made almost in the blink of an eye. Unlike Ralph's

meticulous quest for answers, Raj urgently needs to capture what has transpired lest it be lost forever:

> Memory: that is the problem. The threshold between remembering and forgetting is but a membrane of transience. Yesterday was. Now is – but only for a second. […]
> I think: Sharpen the edge. (CB, 18)

If Ralph's epiphany was about his failure to commune with the snow, Raj's occurs immediately after visiting the morgue in search of his wife and son, after the night of mayhem, when he drives up to the old fortress built by the British in the early 19th century for some respite. Reflecting on the relics of Empire there in the twilight, he "thinks grimly of the effort it must have taken the British to haul the pieces from the harbour", of "the sweat and the pain and the bitter cursing" and all that "useless effort" that was undertaken only to end in "a hilltop collection of crumbling buildings and spiked cannon and a seething, restless town on the plain below" (366). In this contemplation, he implicates the colonial legacy in the events that led to the death of his wife and son.

> And I felt that, somehow, those men who had sweated and strained here, making their little play at fortification only, just over a century and a half later, to cut their losses and run in a well-orchestrated theatre of brass bands and flag-raising, were in no small measure responsible for the fact that my wife and my son were dead, that my home was a shambles…Those men who had sweated and strained had had other, more valuable lessons to teach, but they had offered in the end but the evils of their actions, had propagated but the baser instincts, which took root and flourished so effortlessly in this world they called, with a kind of black humour, *new*. (367)

What Raj realizes here is what Homi Bhabha (1984) has described as the ambivalence that is at the heart of colonial discourse, i.e. that the high ideals of a post-Enlightenment humanism turned into something sinister when exported to the colonies. Thus, whereas the colonists wrote in their manifestoes of the civilizing mission and the march of progress and the incorporation into history of the colonies within a Whiggish world view, the underlying reality was a mockery of this very enterprise. Where the colonists spoke of investment, administration and education, the colonized saw only slavery, exploitation and appropriation of native lands. The effects of this ambivalence extended to the period of the island's independence and beyond.

Moreover, in addition to realising this double-edged facet of colonialism, Raj realizes that he, too, a century and a half later, had in his own way and in the fashion of his own time, re-enacted, or mimicked, the very same colonial enterprise. Ostensibly he had come back so that his son would grow up knowing his extended family, yet underneath he had been lured by the easy wealth that came along with the discovery of oil. He had cloaked his aims by paying lip service to the civilizing mission and doing his bit, yet in the end he had only walled himself within a fortress of his own making, impervious to the troubles of his island:

> It was while looking at all this that I understood why I had come back, understood that in me too had sprung, without question, the intoxication of the offered evils. For I had come back not for Rohan [Raj's son], nor for my grandparents [...] but in order to build forts, redoubts from which to claim safely my share of the easy wealth. No matter how much I talked about doing my bit, about creating the dream, the fact remained that I would not have returned were the money not already there: no matter how much I gave of myself, I would always go away with more. (CB, 367)

Having just lost his wife and son, Raj is of course in emotional turmoil, and it is natural that he would blame himself for what has transpired. Yet there is an element of truth in Raj's lament. For just like the British had come, with their flag-waving marching bands, in exercise of the white man's burden, so too had Raj come to the island with visions of being a doctor, of doing pro bono work and engaging in civilizing pet projects. And yet, just as was the case of the British before him, so too had these high ideals masked a much more selfish motif. What this does is hold up the mirror up to the colonists themselves. As has been described by Jean-Paul Sartre in the introduction to one the founding texts of postcolonial studies, Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> We, too, peoples of Europe, we are being decolonized: meaning the colonist inside everyone of us is surgically extracted in a bloody operation. Let's take a good look at ourselves, if we have the courage, and let's see what has become of us. First of all we must confront an unexpected sight: the striptease of our humanism. Not a pretty sight in its nakedness: nothing but a dishonest ideology, an exquisite justification for plundering; its tokens of sympathy and affectation, alibis for our acts of aggression. (lviii)

As Raj starts his descent back down the hill from the fortress, in between the static on the radio a voice announces that the marines have landed. So, just as Raj is about to initiate a process of expiation, of cleansing himself from his mimicry, the arrival of the marines offer an ironic duplication of the same: Raj and his nation are mimics after all, incapable of independence or governing themselves, and the marines as postcolonial extensions of the colonial masters before them have come to restore order. Apparently there is still gain to be had from the island; the oil rigs are worth defending after all.

2.1. Education

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, mimicry is not just a highly potent force in the life of colonial people, but also reveals the complicity of Western humanism in the practice of colonialism. In an early scene in *The Mimic Men*, we saw how Ralph Singh's fantasies were based on an imaginary West, along with the despair that arose from the realization that these did not deliver that sense of being or essence that he had been pining for. In *A Casual Brutality*, we saw how Raj Ramsingh discovers not only the double-forked nature of colonialism, where the high ideals of theory are matched by low exploitation in practice, but also his own complicity in the colonial project a century and half later.

These effects of mimicry have their roots in the colonization of the mind by means of education. Such a policy was made explicit in the early 1800s by the British in India when it was formulated that a class of people should be created to form a corps of translators and other functionaries to help serve the needs of a growing Empire. A defining passage in this regard is Thomas Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education of 1835:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect […] to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (Quoted in Norton Anthology of English Literature)

Our protagonists, in receiving a colonial education, are the progeny of this policy. There are some differences however. In *The Mimic Men*, Ralph's primary schooling takes place in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when the island of Isabella is still a British protectorate, and is therefore still very colonial in spirit. The school caters to the upper classes and a few talented children from poorer neighbourhoods, and is ironically named Isabella Imperial and run by schoolmasters from the Commonwealth. In *A Casual Brutality*, on the other hand, Raj goes to school in the late 1950s and early 1960s, immediately prior to and after Casaquemada's independence. His Presbyterian school has local teachers and is not in the capital city, which doesn't give it quite the prestige, but is nevertheless run in the colonial tradition.

Despite these differences, the education of the protagonists has similar effects in that it instils in them Western values as opposed to the local or non-Western. In the case of Naipaul's Ralph, the effects are often within the realm of the fantastic, as was shown in his experience of the snow. A similar example involves his first recollection of school:

> My first memory of school is of taking an apple to the teacher. This puzzles me. We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have. (MM, 90)

So strong has been the impact of his education that his memory has become a mixture of fantasy and reality, insisting on the privileged image. Another memory, "about the coronation of the English king and the weight of his crown, so heavy that he can wear it only for a few seconds" (MM, 110), not only underlies the privileging norm, along with the civilizing mission and white man's burden, but also the sham and weighty pomp behind it all.

Key sources of these images are the books that Ralph reads, which, in addition to the English reader provided by school, is supplemented by whatever books have found their way into the library of his peripheral Isabella. Thus, Ralph enters the world of fantasy, reading about Aryan chieftains riding through mountains and plains in old Europe and India, all the while imagining himself as their true heir, but only shipwrecked on his island of Isabella. Elsewhere is the true world, he imagines, from which it follows that his island is reduced to the hopelessly derivative and peripheral. When one of Ralph's classmates shows him a passage from Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, which contains an allusion to his classmate's former-slave owning family of lesser nobility, Ralph is momentarily brought back to earth, reminded that his island is in fact connected with the outside world. Still, the lingering effect of his reading is to see things from the perspective of the centre. Thus, in the scene where Ralph is trying to imagine his grandparents as they were before they became the wealthy owners of the island's Coca-Cola bottling company, he cannot escape the taint of Western books, setting the scene within an English pastoral:

> In my imagination I saw my mother's mother leading her cow, a scene of pure pastoral: calendar pictures of English gardens superimposed on our Isabellan village of mud and grass: village lanes on cool mornings, the ditches green and grassy, the water crystal, the front gardens of thatched huts bright with delicate flowers of every hue. (MM, 107-8)

A colonial education thus alienates and marginalizes Ralph from the local. This is also exemplified in the scene where Ralph and his classmates are on their way to be practice pupils at a teacher's college. As they are walking in the street, one of the boys tells the teacher that they had just passed by the mother of one of the boys and that he had not greeted her. The teacher, appalled, retorts: "Is this true, Hok? Your mother, boy?" (MM, 116). And so the boy skimps to his mother and returns crying. As acutely observed by Ralph, this crying was not just because his "mother was black, though that was a point", but also because of his "betrayal into ordinariness" (MM, 117). The boy, who of mixed race and bookish like Ralph, had been expelled from "that private hemisphere of fantasy where lay his true life" (MM, 117):

> The last book he had been reading was The Heroes. What a difference between the mother of Perseus and that mother! What a difference between the white, blue and dark green landscapes he had so recently known and that street! Between the street and the Chinese section of the Carnegie Library; between that placid shopping mother and the name of Confucius her son had earned among us for his wit and beauty. (MM, 117)

A More Ordinary Snow

In contrast to Naipaul's Ralph in *The Mimic Men*, Bissoondath's Raj Ramsingh goes to school a couple of decades later, and this schooling no longer reflects the same level of imperial bias as Ralph's. Yet the pillars of colonialism are still very prevalent. This is made apparent for example in Raj's memories of the Lord's Prayer at school.

> Every morning at school, the free-standing blackboards that divided the building into classrooms were removed so everyone could see the central stage. Led by a teacher, we would sing a hymn or two, listen to a blood-curdling biblical tale from the headmaster – hundreds of thousands were enthusiastically massacred in this retelling, religion as gripping as the war comics I often read – and end the "worship" by changing the Lord's Prayer. Then the blackboards, either side offering chalked-in information on Civics or Hygiene or the Kings and Queens of England, were put back in place and we, sufficiently fortified, scared witless, got down to the work at hand. (CB, 69)

This excerpt seems to indicate also that one way of learning has been replaced by another. Whereas Naipaul's Ralph's schooling was marked by a British colonialism, with an

emphasis on the classics and preparation for the service of Empire, Bissoondath's Raj's is marked by a Presbyterian utilitarianism. The excerpt also indicates how the props of British rule are on the wane, too, reduced mostly to morning ritual and archaic symbols. For the world has moved on significantly from Ralph's days, and cultural acculturation occurs more through dissemination by Western media and its music, TV, fashion programmes than it does in the classroom. Indeed, as Raj later recounts, the island has become thoroughly absorbed in consumerism, with the people preferring "the frozen to the fresh, paper to peel…Women flew to Miami for day-long shopping trips. Champagne was bought not by the bottle but by the case." (CB, 75). Accordingly, the adult Raj finds himself in ironic "disbelief as every morning I spooned an artificial sweetener – Product of the U.S.A. – into my coffee" (CB, 75-6).

Raj like Naipaul's Ralph is the bookish type. Generally he does not like to engage in physical activity and would rather escape the suffocating feelings he has of the sea, preferring the more secure reaches of printed worlds" (CB, 107). Thus, like Naipaul's Ralph before him, Raj likes to spend time in the library reading books, for example "the collected tales, folk and fairy, of various lands" (CB, 145). Yet whereas Naipaul's Ralph was prone to have his thoughts delve into the world of fantasy, Bissoondath's Raj remains firmly connected to the ground.

This is made apparent in their differing conceptions of snow, made apparent in an episode where Raj is conversing with Jan, his wife to be, at the strip club where she is working, as has become customary whenever they meet. Jan, clearly beholden by the exotic image of the tropics, does not understand Raj's point that the cold is really "not a big deal" (CB, 276), and suggests a reverse Saidian valuation: "One's hot, one's cold. That's like good and bad" (CB, 276). Raj counters by suggesting that she had a desire for warmth because she had grown up in a cold climate and for him this desire was the opposite. Intrinsically, he says, there is no good and bad:

> "There's no good or bad in the weather, Janet. But you're right, there is a difference."
> "Between hot and cold? Come on, you're making it up, right?"
> "It's a very practical difference. It's cold outside, you put on a coat, you go out. It's hot and humid outside, you stay inside and sweat. Heat limits me, winter doesn't. It's a question of having choices, you see." (CB, 276)

What Raj has done is sneak in a privileging norm even though on the surface he suggests none exists. In a move straight out of a textbook on rational choice theory, he cloaks his preference in terms of utility: the more the choice, the greater the value. Notwithstanding the counter argument that presents itself, that one could just as easily choose coolness in the tropics by staying in an air-conditioned room, we see that Raj has become wholly acculturated into a Western view of things.

This rational mindset is also made apparent in the way Raj plays along with island convention when he chose his profession. This was limited to either law, education or medicine, he tells us, as other professions such as psychiatry and dentistry were considered too suspect for the Casaquemadan mindset. So too "nuclear physicists, engineers, writers, dancers, painters, tennis players" all "belonged to another world" (CB, 144). In his mimic island, such professions could only be "fantasies and hobbies," and anyone aspiring to them would be considered mentally unstable if they failed to "wither in the onslaught of social and familial obligation" (CB, 144). It is this confinement that Raj wanted to escape, and the ticket out was a practical profession: Small island's like his "of brutal past, hesitant present and uncertain future, offer but scanty possibility, offer at best a life proscribed" (CB, 142).

The Return of the Gaze

As has been argued by Homi Bhabha (1984, chap. 4), Macaulay's Minute does not simply pave the way for an unambiguous mimic man, but also that mimicry can be a source of resistance. The way Bhabha sees it, this is because the colonist's evoking of the civilizing mission and humanistic values ultimately only produces irony and mockery: the civilizing mission, with all its lip service to universal humanistic values, is about the creation of a class of servants who can be controlled. It calls for the education of the colonized in the image of the colonizer, yet the imperative of control demands that this education remain only partial. Hence the mimic man reflects the colonist's "desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1984, 86). Furthermore, being based on a fundamental ambivalence, i.e. a process of recognition and disavowal, this desire for a reformed colonial subject must continually produce "its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha, 86).

In *The Mimic Men*, this partial nature of the mimic man is exposed, for instance, in the scene where Browne, who is Ralph's classmate, defends Ralph against the unfair racial slurs of their teacher, Major Grant. The episode begins when Browne arrives late

for class, with the major referring to the late student as "Blue-cart Browne" in reference to the trash collector that he would become after graduation. Browne's retort, that "there was a lot of trash on Rupert street" is a defeat for the major as he lived on the street. Such demeaning appellations are normal to the school, Ralph tells us, as no one worried about "wounding anyone's racial or political susceptibilities," (MM, 155) with the result that almost no one was offended:

> A Negro boy with an extravagantly jutting head could, for instance, be Mango to everyone. So now I became Guru. Major Grant gave the name and popularized it. (MM, 155)

The lesson moves on and as the teacher is talking about the history of strikes he makes the quip: "Strikes were not invented, as some of us have begun to believe, by *Gu-ru*-de-va" (MM, 156). This is quite a heavy blow for Ralph, as it occurs at a time when the newspapers have taken notice of Ralph's father, who has become infamous on the island as the leader of a cult of formerly striking dock workers and other poor who had fled to the mountains to start an indigenous resistance movement. It is here that Browne comes to Ralph's defence: "A desk lid banged hard, twice. It was like a warning" (MM, 156-7). And then, finally, when the teacher is discussing the meaning of *caeruleus*, that it means sea-colour, he inadvertently makes the quip: "It might be blue, it might be brown, it might be green. It might even, Blue, be *black*."

> Amid the laughter Browne's desk lid banged again. He rose and walked out of the classroom without a word. Major Grant went red. He fitted his monocle carefully into his eye and looked down at his Vergil. (MM, 157)

The demeaning classroom appellations used so offhandedly by the major can be viewed as expressions of the colonial stereotype, reflecting the complex psychology of desire for and fear of the Other, or of recognition and disavowal, that characterizes colonial discourse. Thus, Major Grant is using the colonial stereotype to maintain psychic distance – almost white, not quite – between teacher and student for fear that the student, i.e. Ralph or Browne, will become too much the same as the colonizer, i.e. Major Grant.

In Bhabha's formulation (Bhabha, 1984, chap. 3), the need to maintain psychic distance is based on the fundamental ambivalence at the heart of colonial discourse. This is so because the colonizer simultaneously figures the colonized as the radical Other of

the Westerner, i.e. beyond the Westerner's comprehension, and as the domesticated Other of the Westerner, i.e. knowable. In other words, the colonized is both inside and outside of Western knowledge.

The stereotype thus seeks to "fix" this radical Otherness of the colonized in knowable form. Yet, even while engaging in this fixing, the colonizer cannot allow the colonized to become too familiar, or too similar to the colonized, as this would undermine the basis of the colonizer's rule over the colonized. In this sense, the stereotype is akin to the fetish, which, in its form of multiple and contradictory belief, must be repeated over and over in an imperfect attempt to secure the native within the boundaries of colonial discourse: "the same old stories of the Negro's animality… must be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time" (Bhabha 1984, 77). Indeed, in our case, so must Major Grant with satisfaction repeat the stories of Mango, or Blue-cart Browne, or Gurudeva.

Yet, in this scene, where Major Grant is engaging in the fetish-like repetition of the colonial stereotype – to keep the students at a distance, as almost white, but not quite – the student Browne also returns the gaze of the colonizer, refusing to partake in this partial representation. As Browne would have it, and as Major Grant himself acknowledges, the quips have gone too far, as the island moves forward in history towards a less discriminatory future.

The Struggle Transformed

The effects of colonialism on the wane are also made evident in the episode in *A Casual Brutality* that recounts a test cricket match between the West Indies and England. It takes place in Raj's school during a new time of nation building, with Casaquemada not yet six years independent. The old adversarial relationship of colonizer and colonized is now played in the spirit of best sportsmanship and camaraderie, with the entire fledgling nation tuned into the broadcast of the game on radio.

> Everywhere, all over the island, radios were tuned to the cricket broadcast; men walked around with transistors held to their ears; women carried them in their bags; at school during the lunch break, boys in the classrooms and teachers in the staffroom clustered around radios, the transmission more gripping for being distant and fuzzy with static. When a West Indian batsman hit a six or reached his century, a collective cheer went up, the school sounding from the street like a hive of suddenly stirred bees. (CB, 86)

The game as broadcast to the nation comes with all the markers of a new nationhood and its metonymical props. There is the fanaticism that islanders have acquired for cricket, an Englishman's game now transposed into a sport of the islanders' own, there are the collective hails and cheers that go along with a new sense of national identity and solidarity, the feeling of a shared history, of striving together for the common good. (cf. Anderson, 1991).

Yet, after an initial success, the match turns in the English team's favour and amid "the groans and lowly uttered oaths" (CB, 86) the boys begin drifting away from the radio to the corridors. It is at this point that Raj's cousin Surein does the unspeakable by disrespecting the West Indies team: "What I tell all-you! What I tell all-you! Is the Englishman game, he's the best—" (CB, 86). Surein refuses to budge from his position amid the outcry that ensues, and even teachers ask Raj what is wrong with his cousin. It is only days later when Raj's cousin explains himself: "the only traitor is you" (CB, 87):

> "How much Singh or Khan or Nath or Ali it have on it, eh? Five? Six? Where all the Indian players gone? How come they ain't get pick, you could tell me?" (CB, 87)

> "I sayin' that it ain't have enough Indians on the team to make it West Indian. I sayin' that they pick people for their race. And I sayin' that if you support that team, you sayin' is all right to do that, and that make you a traitor." (CB, 88)

Thus, the old struggle between colonizer and colonized, as epitomized for example in the psychologically complex and antagonistic relationship between Naipaul's Ralph Singh and his expatriate teachers, has now been transposed into a struggle inside the nation, where the sense of an inclusive nationalism is pitted against the vision of racial conflict.

What Raj's cousin is doing is refusing to play along in the performance that is integral to the making of national tradition. Indeed, according to Bhabha (1984, 139-170), a nation's history, culture and traditions do not exist on their own, but are actualized by means of their repetition and performance in events like the cricket game in question. The cousin's refusal therefore disrupts the narrative of the nation and simultaneously draws attention to its constructed nature. Also, in a move that is "a terrifying vision" to Raj, at this point just fifteen years old, Raj realizes that his cousin "needed someone to hate, and

it was only through these passions, their stir and their consequence, that he could fashion an image of an unassailable self" (CB, 88):

> It would be years before I would see that I had confused school with life – the naivety of childhood with the reality of adulthood – years before I would perceive the theorem of race that informed every attitude of our little Casaquemada. In this, too, Surein went before me, never seeing it, being enmeshed in it. (CB, 88)

A key aspect of this episode is therefore Raj's refusal to go along with a sense of self that will play the racial card and in this way perpetuate, within a new framework of post-colonial independence, the desire of nationalism to define its purity against the darkness of the other, or complicity of post-Enlightenment humanism in the colonial project. Raj's wish is to stand for a Western humanism – of equality, fraternity, liberty – reformed of its colonial legacy. Yet in returning to his island and acting like the colonizers before him, and also when asked to make a judgement whether the marines should be called in or not, Raj discovers that he too is complicit with that other side of Enlightenment humanism.

2.2. Gender

As discussed in this thesis so far, mimicry has had a strong impact on the lives of the protagonists of Naipaul's and Bissoondath's novels. With regard to Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, the effects of mimicry were well encapsulated in the way he invested the phenomenon of snow and the city of London with almost magical powers, and the feelings of loss that arose when a communion failed to materialize. With regard to Raj Ramsingh in *A Casual Brutality*, we found that although he saw no good or bad in snow as such, he continued to engage in an Orientalist privileging of the core over the periphery.

Other impacts of mimicry discussed were the loss of tradition as well as the feeling of being shipwrecked or abandoned on one's island of birth. With Naipaul's Ralph, especially strong was his awareness of role playing and his sense of inadequacy due to his island origins, and of not belonging either to his island of Isabella or London. As discussed in the previous section, such feelings arise from the partial nature of the mimic man. He is educated and grows up to have a disdain for his 'peripheral' local culture while aspiring to a Western world or 'centre' that nevertheless does not accept him or even has contempt for him due to his partial nature, i.e. for being "almost white, but not quite," and so the mimic man cannot feel at home in either culture. These ideas have been explored by Homi Bhabha in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man" (Bhabha, 1984, chap. 4).

As has been noted by Anne McClintock (1995), however, the title of Bhabha's essay draws attention to how postcolonial theory on mimicry, with Franz Fanon being a notable exception, has focused on the colonized male. Bhabha's often quoted essay on the topic "refers only to race, eliding in the process gender and class" (McClintock, 1995, 64). The "ironically generic" 'Man' of the essay's title both "conceals and reveals" that "Bhabha is really only talking about men" (McClintock, 1995, 64).

Yet mimicry impacts women in a postcolonial setting in many ways (see McClintock, 1995, 61-74). Women are the prime example of a group who have not been provided an equal footing in society in theory only, which, as argued by McClintock (1995, 62), has often made women mimickers par excellence. Drawing on the ideas of Luce Irigaray (1985), McClintock explains that "In a world colonized by male desire," women have learned to "mimic feminity as a social mask" that can be used to turn from a position of subordination into one of affirmation (McClintock, 1995, 62). In my reading, women can thus use mimicry to get what they want, although the question remains whether they want

the right thing. Furthermore, as noted by McClintock, the role of the white woman is unique in a colonial setting. Subservient to the white male, yet superior to the 'native,' she offers a different vantage to the colonial situation.

This focus on the male has extended also to academic study of *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality*. This is to be expected since the protagonists are male and colonial. Yet the wives of the protagonists play an important role and in many respects their experience mirrors that of the protagonists. In what follows, I shall address how mimicry and gender intertwine in the two novels with focus on the protagonist-wife relationship.

Together in Self-Defence

In Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh's inability to commune with the snow and the city upon arrival in London marks the beginning of a rather prolonged episode where Ralph is reduced to despair and feelings of extinction. At this stage, when he still a young man and is not aware that his feelings originate from mimicry or lack of authenticity, he compensates for his failure by donning the role of the colonial dandy.

> In London I had no guide. There was no one to link my present with my past, no one to note my consistencies or inconsistencies. It was up to me to choose my character, and I chose the character that was easiest and most attractive. I was the dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship. (MM, 24)

The older Ralph, upon writing his memoirs, becomes aware that this role is very much the creation of Lieni, the Maltese housekeeper of the boarding house where he first lived in London. Lieni, who herself plays at being "cosmopolitan" and the "smart London girl" (MM, 14), finds in Ralph's character compensation for the loss of an Indian lover she had once had in Italy. Thus, contemplates the elder Ralph: "It was Lieni who dressed me, approved of me, and sent me out to conquer" (MM, 25-6), and "I became her apt pupil" (MM, 25).

Ralph's womanising, which targets white girls, can be viewed as a displaced way for Ralph to achieve the centre that he has been so looking for. As Franz Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to possess the white woman is also to possess the centre: "When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine" (45). In McClintock's formulation, this amounts to a transference away from a politics of substitution to one of appropriation:

For Fanon, the envy of the black man takes the form of a fantasy of territorial displacement: "The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place." This fantasy can be called a *politics of substitution* […] The relation to the white woman is altogether different: The white woman is seized, possessed and taken hold of, not as an act of substitution, but as an act of appropriation. (McClintock, 362)

Ralph's womanising does not bring him any respite, of course, as there is no "civilization" or "dignity" to be grasped in his efforts. He begins to see only a "failure, a deficiency", as well as "violation and self-violation" (MM, 30), a defence against a "deep feeling of irrelevance and intrusion" (MM, 220). It is only in meeting Sandra, his wife-to-be, that rescues him from feelings of despair and thoughts of suicide.

Where Ralph is seeking to compensate for his failure to access the centre he had been pining for, and where his attempts at womanising are a bitter failure, Sandra too experiences a sense of lack that is similar in structure to Ralph's 'almost, but not quite.' Thus, as a woman in 1940s England, she too is in a subservient position in her society, expected to perform feminine roles, all the while she is granted equality in name only: 'almost a man, but not quite' or 'almost equal, but not quite.' Her lack of status is further accentuated by the fact that she is working-class and has failed her university examinations for a second time. Thus, as she discusses her fate with Ralph in a BBC canteen she is very aware of her limited prospects.

> What awaited her? The secretarial course, the librarian's course, the common employer. She went on, railing at her society, bitter at her lack of protection and patrons within it. A job in the bank; the typing pool; the Woolworth's counter. (MM, 55)

This is a predicament that Ralph can identify with. He realizes that "though of the city, her position in it was like my own," that she had "no family", "two or three school friends, now scattered," "no group," "alone in the world and determined to fight her way up" (MM, 53). And just as Ralph feels disdain for the island of his birth, she "hated the common – her own word – from which she nevertheless freely acknowledged herself to have sprung" (MM, 53). Till the end, Ralph tells us, "she had a cruel eye for the common, and she passed to me the word and the assessing skill" (MM, 53). Thus, Ralph's disdain for and desire to shake of his island origins is matched by Sandra's fear and contempt for

her class and desire to move up in society: “It was easy to see how she felt imprisoned and fearful and how important it was to her to be free of the danger that commonness which encircled her” (MM, 53).

Ralph’s role playing as a colonial dandy is mirrored in Sandra’s avidity for the occasion: “No one was more sensitive to anything that savoured of the luxurious; no one had a greater capacity for creating occasions” (MM, 53). Thus, during Ralph’s darkest times, when he contemplates the “Luger at my head” (MM, 54) of abandoning school, thoughts of Sandra console him, and “out of the drabness” they create an occasion that was “the perfect basis” for their relationship (MM, 54).

Ralph and Sandra thus emerge as two mimics, the one from the colonies and the other from the metropolis, who join in what Ralph calls a form of “self-defence” (MM, 81). Deep down, they both realize their transactional state and find a certain intimacy in sharing this knowledge. For Ralph, Sandra becomes a symbol of strength and stability, “all that was positive” in a situation where he had been reduced to “drifting about the big city” in futility (MM, 54). Sandra, in turn, finds in Ralph a mutual play actor and a ticket away from the working class. So, at the BBC canteen, when suddenly, fixing her moist eyes on Ralph, she asks, indeed almost orders: “Why don’t you propose, you *fool*?” (MM, 55), Ralph can only acquiesce and apologise for not having done so earlier.

In marrying Ralph, Sandra enters high society and can act out the role of a privileged colonial lady. As the expat wife, who until then “had never travelled or stayed in a hotel” (MM, 64), she joins a group of professional young couples, with the men all having “studied abroad and married abroad”, and the women being “fantastically cosmopolitan wives or girl friends” (MM, 66). They consume “quantities of champagne and caviar”, enjoying them “for the sake of the words alone” (MM, 67). Even before their first fortnight on the island, her transformation is complete:

> Sandra could be heard disdaining demise and expressing a preference for Mercier above all others. The splendid girl! Sprung so sincerely from her commonness. (MM, 67)

In marrying a white girl, Ralph can return to the island of his birth as ‘victorious,’ without the shame of not having been able to carve out for himself a life abroad. With his return Ralph also experiences a new sense of purpose: “I have spoken of the mood of celebration with which I left London and which for the next ten years I sought to maintain, never ceasing to savour each day the pleasure of the whole mind” (MM, 59-60). No longer

harbouring fantasies of the West, "without fear or longing or the feeling of being denied the world" (MM, 67), Ralph begins to feel a sense of identity, although deep within this is a passive, placid personality

> I felt that I had changed. I recognized that the change was involuntary, so that at last my 'character' became not what others took it to be but something personal and ordained. This placidity, at the heart of celebration, I felt to be my strength; I visualized it as existing within a walled, impregnable field. I lived neutrally; activity was real, but it was all on the surface; I felt that I would never allow myself to be damaged again. (MM, 68)

Ralph's and Sandra's lavish lifestyle is further boosted by Ralph's phenomenal success as an urban developer of suburban land he had inherited. Yet the extravagance inevitably exhausts itself. Soon after arriving on the island, Ralph notes of their group that the "talk is a bit too loud, too hearty, too aggressive" and that "these people are acting," "over-stressing the fullness of their lives" (MM, 75). Elite culture, as mimicked in the colonies, is not what it was originally thought to be. Very soon, "we got to know as much about the group as there was to know; all that followed was repetition and ageing" (MM, 66).

The island and its culture is ultimately revealed as derivative, and this fact is much lamented by the expat group, for example the island's lack of a "good symphony concert" (MM, 78-9). It becomes a competition among the wives to see who is able to invite a visitor from abroad for dinner, an occasion to hear of news from the "world" and to complain about the island's inadequacies: "Over such a visitor our women would fight, practising exclusions to indicate disfavour or offering invitations to announce reconciliation" (MM, 78). Sandra, too, loses that sense of glamour she felt on first arriving on the island. Although outwardly she is living the high life, Ralph notes, "she had begun to get some of my geographical sense, that feeling of having been flung off the world" (MM, 81).

> "I suppose this must be the most inferior place in the world," she [Sandra] said. "Inferior natives, inferior expats. Frightfully inferior and frightfully happy. The two must go together." (MM, 82)

Here, again Sandra is mirroring Ralph. The failure of Ralph to commune with the snow and the city in London is now mirrored in Sandra's failure to commune with the island of Isabella. There are no streets of gold either in London or Isabella. Thus, where Ralph's

fantasy of the snow only exposed a forlorn city, Sandra's experience of the island has turned from a fantasy of the exotic into the recognition of the derivativeness not only of the island, but also of that expatriate group to which she had thought she belonged. The inferior nation only seems to attract inferior expats who in their fake happiness must keep on pretending – in all the parties and the occasions – that they are the genuine material. Sandra, now seeing with Ralph's eyes, is also experiencing what Cooppan (2009) has called an anxiety of location that is characteristic of the postcolonial condition, where the ability to see things from an outsider's perspective leads to feelings of "unease, uncertainty, insecurity and panic" (Cooppan, 87).

For Sandra the island has thus lost its lustre; she has not found her centre. This is reflected in Ralph's and Sandra's relationship, as they take to sleeping in separate bedrooms, and both start having extra marital affairs. Together they still pine to get out of the house into what is now seen as "that most inferior place in the world," but as Ralph laments, "Where could we go?" (MM, 82). The beaches, the mountain villages, the rudimentary culture could all be taken "as read" (MM, 82).

After Ralph suffers a mental breakdown at a party, the marriage is all but over. Sandra leaves for a shopping trip to Miami, but both Ralph and she know that she will not return. Just before Sandra's departure, when at a restaurant she walks over to try to make amends with Wendy, who is a descendant of one of the island's most noted French slave owning families, she snubs Sandra:

> And Wendy did not see her. No anger on Wendy's face, no drumming of feet or hands, no humming and slow nodding, no staring ahead or through. Wendy simply did not see. It was as though she had been born and trained for this perfect moment of non-seeing. (MM, 95)

Ultimately, then, the island's expatriate lifestyle remains only on the surface, and Sandra has not found her centre. For Ralph, too, his marriage to Sandra marked only a "period in parenthesis," (MM, 49) a reaction or defence against a "deep feeling of irrelevance and intrusion" and "unsuitability for the role" in which he was drawn, leading to "inevitable failure" (220).

A Semblance of Domesticity

In contrast to Ralph Singh of *The Mimic Men*, Raj Ramsingh of *A Casual Brutality* does not arrive in Toronto seeking the centre by means of fantasy, but rather by sheer hard

study. His timidity and focus on his studies keeps initially keeps him from exploring the city, but he soon begins to see with "less fearful eyes" (CB, 162). What he finds is an antithesis of his island, a clean and well-functioning Western cityscape:

> Newspaper boxes: it amazed me that people didn't steal from them. The unlittered streets: it amused me to see people stuffing candy wrappers into their pockets or purses […] Traffic signals: the obedience they commanded from the pedestrians was stunning. (CB, 166)

The only times that Raj is shaken, it seems, is when he passes by other Indian or black immigrants, who seek him out "with their eyes, with their nods of invitation," which he surmises is "the admission of weakness and loss implicit in their stares of racial inclusion, their searching for comfort in the simplest of ways" (CB, 162). And in contrast to Kayso, a fellow Trinidadian who first shows Raj around Toronto and sees in the dirt and smell of Kensington Market a kind of twisted ethnocentrism, a more genuine world that is a reminder of home, Raj can only find disappointment:

> My disappointment was keen. Kayso had mentioned the stench, but even his vivid description of its effect seemed muted in the vibrant reality. The charm of the market escaped me, and I recalled with puzzlement another of Kayso's declarations that, where much of the city slumbered in a scrubbed sterility, Kensington Market brimmed with the vitality of real people, as if, somehow, cracked accents and brusque manners were of greater value, were more human, than self-discipline and a sense of propriety. (CB, 221)

What Raj finds in the city is hence mostly a Manichean purity or cleanliness, also signifying the Puritan work ethic and propriety, that is at times interrupted by a memory or a stench or a brusqueness that is associated with the periphery. As Raj himself pompously declares, he "had not come to Toronto to find Casaquemada," to play the "role of the ethnic, deracinated and costumed, drawing around himself the defensive postures of the land left behind" (221).

Yet, in contrast to Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, who had created the role of the colonial dandy for himself during his university days in London, Raj remains the recluse, avoiding the company of others. Thus, he devotes his time purely to study, spending days on end alone in his room with his books without contact with the outside world. He has no friends or interest in making friends and the one time that his closest acquaintance at

the medical school invites him to dinner, he rudely turns down the offer. Essentially his only contact with the outside world is confined to occasional visits to a strip club to empty his mind from the pressure of his studies. It would seem then, that in Toronto, Raj has found a life of isolation, or a life of the mind, fearful of and unaffected by personal relationships.

It is not surprising, then, that when he meets his wife-to-be Jan, who is waitressing at the club, that her easy-going demeanour has a disarming effect and they gradually strike up conversation. They get into the habit of brief conversation, and soon learn that they share a sense of outsideness. Thus, where Raj is marked by an introverted childhood in the periphery, Jan too had grown up as an outsider, "going solo" since she was a baby (CB, 289). Even with a degree in French from the University of Toronto, in the Canada of the 1980s, she is like Sandra in being something of an 'almost, but not quite' in that her career prospects seem limited.

Eventually, she invites him over to her place for a party and he accepts, because "it was safe" (CB, 280) and "her voice, teasing, challenging, suddenly shy and resolutely nonchalant with the invitation" dampens the last strains of doubt in Raj's mind (281). At the party they bond, with Jan telling Raj about her distant parents and Raj telling her about him being an orphan, raised by his grandparents. During that night they conceive a child. Just over a month later, after Raj has been studiously trying to avoid her, she finally gets in touch with him over the phone with the news and the fundamental question: "D'you want your child growing up without a father?" (CB, 294). "She had, inadvertently, hit on the crux of it […] In a few seconds of silence, I confronted as I hadn't since childhood the impenetrability of my own void" (CB, 294-295). It would seem that with all the focus on books, in mimicking utilitarian values, he has forgotten to engage in life.

Not soon thereafter they get married and in Raj's words, "all that came after was like a barrier" (CB, 295). They move into Jan's parents' house into "a semblance of domesticity" (CB, 316). The house establishes itself as an in-between space, "crouched between high rises and low rises of unremarkable composition, where they live "sandwiched" between a basement that had never been finished and an attic to which access is too cumbersome (CB, 316). There, "cocooned in a reigning silence that established itself despite constant chatter and music form the radio or television, Jan and I lived our individual obsessions" (CB, 318).

Raj becomes a doctor, and having settled in the house of Jan's parents, it would seem that he has been able to move beyond Bhabha's 'almost, but not quite,' to achieve

the centre, and escape any feelings of lack or inadequacy that might have lingered due to having grown up in the periphery. In Fanon's terms, he has been successful in his desire to enter the house of the white man and possess the white woman: I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 45).

Jan takes on the role of the dutiful wife. "She cooked, she cleaned, she sold shoes" (CB, 318). She picks up piano, but "could not go beyond the books" (CB, 318). When a guest visits, "Jan came back in carrying drinks, wine for Kayso and me, beer for herself" (CB, 318). Ultimately, although outwardly both Raj and Jan have achieved a middle-class idyll of sorts, the centre is nevertheless deferred, or at least vacillating, neither here, nor there.

> How easily, in how unmeasured a manner the years slipped by, without rhythm, without crackle, inert in their sameness. Years that sit amoebic in my memory, edges fluctuating, the centre indefinite and ductile. (CB 318)

For Naipaul's Ralph and Sandra the decision to return to Isabella had been hardly more than an afterthought as they had not gained access to that "centre" in London that they had aspired for. Bissoondath's Raj and Jan, however, have outwardly no reason to make the move, save for that sense of complacency that had come to characterise their lives. Thus, when Raj and Jan are visited by Kayso, a celebrated Casaquemadan human rights lawyer, who paints a picture of the island as a tropical paradise, with magnificent beaches and an easy-going lifestyle, Jan is sold to the idea: "I could use some adventure in my life" (CB, 324). Raj, too, becomes aware of his own lack of direction:

> I remained silent much of the time, letting her ask questions, letting him answer them, envying his tone of a man content with life and self, feeling my own drift, my own lack of purpose. I wondered, with a kind of fear, if this was what he had felt before returning to Casaquemada. (CB, 323)

Raj's and Jan's move to the island, however, is far from what they had hoped for. The island, with the oil boom over, is mired in corruption and unrest. And while Raj is able to find a sense of purpose within his medicinal practice, for Jan the expat lifestyle, a far cry from the social whirl of the expat circles of The *Mimic Men*, has been reduced to

staying at home and taking care of their young son, without social contact beyond their neighbours and Raj's relatives:

> While everyone, even I who grew up here with a feeling of apartness, managed to fit into the tableau of shadow and settled dust, she stood out in relief, extraneous, as if strayed from a different painting; it was not that she could not, but that she would not fit in, and not only here but in Casaquemada itself. She was as if determined to resist. (CB, 112)

Jan is exasperated by the heat and the lack of care for the island's poor, as well as her inability to fit in. She has already made her decision to leave: "The princess married a doctor, but she sure as hell didn't get the magic kingdom" (CB, 43). Ultimately, if Raj can play the colonist on the island, she has been reduced to a supporting, confined, role:

> She said, "I don't feel safe here, Raj."
> "Well, instead of a trip, then, how about enclosing the porch in burglar-proofing? It's the latest thing, everybody's doing it."
> "I'm talking about this fucking island of yours, Raj."
> But that's partly why we're here— "
> "It's why you're here." (CB, 45)

What is left is for Jan to leave. When Raj gets the tickets and indicates that he will be leaving along with her, she retorts: "'So you're coming too [sic]". It was less a question than a statement of dissatisfaction" (CB, 215).

Thus, for the most part Raj and Jan enter the roles opened for them half-heartedly or even discard them as soon as they are offered to them. This contrasts with the way that Ralph and Sandra in *the Mimic Men* embraced their mimic roles and even revelled in them for some time. Ultimately, however, the mimic roles do not offer a sufficient sense of identity and lead to alienation with lesser or greater self-awareness.

Mirrors of Mimicry

As discussed above, the trajectory of the characters in *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality* is one of seeking a 'centre,' which, for different reasons, remains elusive, outside their grasp. On part of the protagonists, Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* emerges as victorious through his marriage to Sandra, which, together with his business success,

gains him entry into elite circles in his island of Isabella. In *A Casual Brutality*, Raj too achieves a centre in an esteemed profession, and through marriage to Jan and moving into her parent's house. Thus, in Fanon's terms, Ralph and Raj fulfil the 'native' fantasy of marrying whiteness in an act of appropriation, while Raj also moves into the master's house in an act of substitution.

The seeking of a centre by the protagonists, and its deferral, is mirrored in the wives. In the case of Sandra in *The Mimic Men*, her marriage to Ralph earns her a ticket out of the working class and into expatriate society in the colonies. Jan in *A Casual Brutality*, in turn, escapes waiting tables and enters the suburban idyll. With the introduction of gender, and also class, the notion of a centre, as originally formulated for the mimic man, undergoes a transformation. Fanonian desire with regards to the women works in reverse. The white woman seeks the centre through the mimic man.

Sandra and Jan also reverse their husbands' streets of gold syndrome in that they discover that the reality of life in the tropics is not so exotic after all. As colonial white women, they are unable to carve out a viable role for themselves. Naipaul's Sandra, with her proclivity for creating occasions, lives a life of champagne and beach resorts, which, in its ultimate futility and repetitiveness, does not bring fulfilment. Bissoondath's Jan, some decades later, experiences a more violent island, with the night-time shootings and iron barred windows, and is caught in a trap of isolated domesticity. Where McClintock and Luce Irigaray has argued that the mimicry of feminity can be a source of affirmation, this is not the case with Sandra and Jan. There is no genuine encounter with the island that would allow for the creation of new ways of thinking and being.

2.3 Nation

Naipaul's and Bissoondath's novels portray the fictional islands of Isabella and Casaquemada respectively over two different time periods, but we can think of them as depicting the tale of a single island nation that is much like Trinidad. Both islands were colonies first of the Spanish, then the French and the British. They describe a small island off the coast of Venezuela with the economy first driven by sugar, then tourism and finally, in *A Casual Brutality*, oil. The population is divided between a black community descending from slaves from Africa, and the descendants of indentured labourers from India, who are in the minority. Independence from the British in both islands coincides with the independence of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1962.

Yet these are fictional islands. Thus, for example, contra historical record and apropos the island's insignificance, in *A Casual Brutality* Columbus is too old and weary to even bother gracing the island with a landing. Similarly, the island's founding myth tells the story of a malcontent sailor who was left alone on the island by a ship in order to teach him a lesson. Upon the return of the ship a few months later, the man had been found to have burned himself in the little hut that he had built. This burning of the hut, *casa quemada*, signifying the self-annihilation of mimic man and mimic nation, is far more ominous than the Holy Trinity that is the inspiration for the actual Trinidad.

Whereas Naipaul's novel describes an island from the late 1930s, when it was still a British protectorate, through to the years immediately after independence, Bissoondath's novel stretches from the 1950s through to a period immediately after an oil bust in the early 1980s. Thus, the nation of Naipaul's Ralph Singh is still very agrarian and colonial in spirt. The colonial stamp is evident, for example, in that up until independence important positions in government are still held by expatriates, while society makes the shift from the farm and plantation to the city. By the time of Bissoondath's Raj's narration, decolonization has progressed to the point where government positions and the schools are run by locals, while the island has further transformed into a modern consumer society. The traditional crop of sugar has receded in importance (ironically, there is a sugar shortage on the island) to have been replaced by tourism and finally an oil boom and bust.

The derivativeness of the island's culture, politics and economy is a prevalent theme in both novels. In *The Mimic Men* this is highlighted, for example, by emphasizing that the population is not native, with the Amerindians destroyed or interbred to extinction. The flora and fauna, including the coconut, the sugarcane, the mango, have come from

elsewhere, and so we find Ralph walking "among trees, some still without popular names," whose seeds had in some cases been brought to the island "in the intestines of slaves" (MM, 177). Mimicry, Ralph's friend Ethelbert Browne educates him, stretches all the way to names, as "slaves were frequently given the names of Anglo-Saxon kings or Roman generals (MM, 177).

In *A Casual Brutality,* the colonial legacy is made manifest especially in the relics that the former rulers have left on the island. Each colonist, we learn, had come to the island full of fanfare and high ideals, yet abandoned the island once it was no longer useful. Thus, Raj Ramsingh, the novel's protagonist, tells us of the old British "ruined fort," with its "old cannon" pointing its thick cylinder "dramatically, if ineffectually to the sea" (CB, 366). Roosevelt field, the American WWII airstrip, has become deserted, sidewalks and secondary roads "ripped up or eaten to extinction by the creeping vegetation," with the planes on the strip "replaced by the whine of racing cars plastered in oil-company stickers" (CB, 137). There is also Freedom Park, with former appellations of Plaza de la Virgen, Place Bellefontaine and Victoria Square, formerly "the private reserve of lords and ladies" whose "dogs were allowed in, but not ordinary Casaquemadans" (CB, 253). It is now home for the hordes of the island's growing unemployed who have made it "a site for political unrest" (CB, 254).

The political ideologies imported to the island are ill suited for it and ultimately transform into something more ominous. Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* not only learns this lesson very quickly upon becoming a government minister, but also comes to realize that the life of the colonial politician is short lived in a mimic nation where political survival depends on stoking the deep divisions and racial tensions. Even while he is still a government minister in the 1960s, Naipaul's Ralph watches the beginnings of a disintegration. By the early 1980s, stoked by an oil boom and bust, the disintegration has become so complete that Bissoondath's Raj observes the calling in of the marines to restore order. Just like numerous other peripheral island nations in the world today, and just like the patients that Bissoondath's Raj treats in the novel, the island has become terminally ill.

A Broken Nation

Early in the writing of his memoirs, Ralph Singh, the protagonist of *The Mimic Men*, tells us how, when still at the peak of his power as a government minister of his newly independent island, he had envisioned writing a very different kind of memoir. It would

have been in the evening of his years, after a successful career, after settling in an old colonial plantation. His topic would have been the colonial legacy and the tension and the distress that it had unleashed upon the world.

> It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors, it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about. (MM, 38)

Even while Ralph imagines that he would be writing of the deep disorder that colonialism had wrought in the world, he is also imagining that the turmoil had somehow been resolved or pacified. In his words, if the "empires of our time" had been "short-lived" and "altered the world for ever" (MM, 38), his dream has his island returned to a calm after the turmoil of the independence years.

> I would have gone riding in the early morning. The labourers would have been at their undemanding tasks; cutting down the pods with gullets, hand-shaped knives which are like the weapons of medieval knights; or sitting in the shade, arcadian [sic] figures … Words would have been exchanged, about their jobs, their families, the progress of their sons at school. Labourers of the olden time! Not yet 'the people'! (MM, 40)

In this mimic man's fantasy, the crude reality of plantation life has been transformed into a timeless, idealised rustic idyll. Thus, before getting to work at his desk, "slowly patterning the white paper with the blackest of inks," Ralph would enjoy "true cocoa, such as Montezuma and his court drank," "freshly baked bread and avocadoes," "all served on a tablecloth of spotless white, with "a fine wire netting" keeping out tropical insects while "permitting a view" (MM, 40). Thus, Ralph envisions himself as fulfilling the Fanonian fantasy of moving into the master's house. The rustic plantation of his imagination seems to be located not in the future but within some pastoral past, however, and the 'partial' history Ralph dreams of writing seems to have ended even before it began.

This fantasy speaks of Ralph's desire "to undo" (MM, 43) the historical forces that had been unleashed with the independence movements around the world, and his own role as a politician in bringing about the change. For, by the time of Ralph's writing in the early 1960s, the decolonization of his island, as elsewhere in the developing world, has reached full momentum. But as Ralph himself is keenly aware, the visions and the ideologies by which these movements are commanded are merely borrowed, born elsewhere, and in their translation into his Caribbean island have transformed for the worse. The role of the colonial politician, Ralph tells us, is only that of a mimicker, imitating the Europeans, paying heed to high ideals of post-Enlightenment humanism, all the while pitting one distressed group against another:

> But the order to which the colonial politician succeeds is not his order. It is something he is compelled to destroy; destruction comes with his emergence and is a condition of his power. (MM, 43)

What Ralph is telling us is that the winds of change that had taken root in more than twenty countries are unstoppable; the politician is powerless to stop them even if he wanted to. Whereas the people want independence and the fruits of independence, the colonial politician can offer no more than imitation and dependence. The colonial politician can break down old colonial structures, but at the end of the day all that is done is a replication. And since the demand for rights and a better life resonate all around, the colonial politician ultimately succumbs and turns demagogue, feeding on the fears and the baser instincts. It seems, then, that there is something in the peripheral nation, with its legacy of slavery and borrowed culture that does not make for progress. The politician, of the left or the right, is powerless to bring about fundamental change.

By the 1970s, In *A Casual Brutality*, these forces have reached a culmination point. In the opening scene of the novel, Raj Ramsingh, after having lost his wife and son in the recent uprising on the island, is getting ready to flee his island for a last time. As he arrives at the airport, there are hardly any planes flying and the terminal is almost deserted, except for the "men in green," to keep order (CB, 5). Some of those fleeing, like his former patient Dr Lal and his wife, who is terminally ill like the island of Casaquemada, are leaving in such a hurry that they have left their cars in the parking lot with the "keys in the ignition" (CB, 16). Raj, too, stripped bare by recent events, is leaving without luggage,

which causes irritation in the check-in officer: “No luggage? What you mean, no luggage?” (CB, 5).

Indeed, Raj is among those of the privileged few who have what is needed in case of rapid departure: “a one-way ticket,” “U.S. bills and traveller’s cheques” and his “Canadian citizenship and social insurance cards” (CB, 6). Life in a peripheral country is precarious and those who can have made their preparations in case of unrest or a falling out with the political regime, that is “people who change countries like they change clothes. When it gets too dirty— ” (CB, 9).

Raj’s uncle Grappler, a civil servant who has spent decades in the corridors of power, and of the same generation as Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, takes time out to ponder the little green men, who are the marines, who have been called in to restore order, and are now surrounding them at the airport:

> “Order,” Grappler says. “Is this what it’s all about.” His voice is flat, the question not a question.
> “Maybe now we have a chance”…
> “Of course, they haven’t helped anybody else. Jamaica. Grenada. Ferdinand Isle.” (CB, 3)

This trajectory of the island is familiar to us from many other islands in the region and elsewhere in the developing world. And now, as the troops have been called in, Raj’s uncle seems to have lost faith in the independence project. Giving voice to the conventional wisdom, he tells us his generation had failed in part because during the colonial period they had been bestowed only with partial responsibility, and in this way, they were set up to fail. The shift in power had been too swift, “we weren’t trusted enough” (CB, 200), with the result that “maybe independence for us just meant the right to loot ourselves” (CB, 199).

At work here, of course, is Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry all over again. In this reading, the British created a class of mimic men to take over the affairs of the island, but they did not provide the tools to succeed in the task. This is because the British had only sought a partially Anglicized other, which in the case of our mimic nation could be characterized as ‘almost a nation, but not quite' (cf. Bhabha 1994, 85-92).

A Divided Nation

As was shown above the negative forces that were unleashed in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* find completion in Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality*. A key contributor to the unrest is undoubtedly the deep divisions between different groups in the islands of Isabella and Casaquemada, which we are thinking of here as one. Even under colonial rule different groups had not been able to carve out a common identity, and after independence the efforts by the politicians to create a sense of shared community ended in failure, with the various ethnic groups on the island, the people from the farms and the people from the city, the rich and the poor, isolated from and distrustful of each other. The difficulty, of course, is the ingrained distrust and acceptance of poverty, with no instant alleviation available for the poor. Whereas during colonial rule, potential unrest was kept in check by the threat of violence, with independence came a greater opportunity to voice out grievances.

These island divisions are embodied in Naipaul's Ralph Singh in many ways. Thus, the father's side of Ralph's family comes from the rural poor, while his mother's side, whose brother has succeeded as a bottler of Coca-Cola, represents an escape from this. His father, during a mental breakdown, had one day refashioned himself as a kind of pundit spiritual leader, and lead a group of striking dockworkers and other followers into the mountains to start anew, turning their back on the new modernity. Ralph, in contrast, receives a Western education in one of the island's premier schools.

Perhaps because of this background, Ralph learns from early childhood to navigate through the island's tensions and is more aware of them. This is made apparent, for instance, during a drive out in the country with his uncle when Ralph is in his early teens, as they pass the Stockwell sugar estates:

> We were in the area of swamps. Sodden thatched huts, set in mud, lined the road. It was a rainy day, grey, the sky low and oppressive, the water in the ditches thick and black, people everywhere semi-naked, working barefooted in the mud which discoloured their bodies and faces and their working rags. (MM, 118)

This sight has Ralph "more than saddened, more than angry" (MM, 118). The working conditions of these plantation labourers, he observes, have not improved since the times of slavery and indentured labour. Ralph, exasperated, asks "Why can't they give them

leggings?" Only to have his uncle retort: "Leggings cost money" (MM, 119). This is a disappointment to Ralph, as he had expected "more passion and more pain" (MM, 119).

One particularly symbolic entanglement occurs when a former slave owning family of French descent enters a horse named Tamango into a regional horse race. In school, the event is endlessly fascinating, and even Ralph is drawn to it. As it turns out, however, just days before the race the horse disappears and is later found in the forest as the victim of a ritual sacrifice. Ralph, upon hearing this news, immediately recognizes the tradition behind this, and understands that it has been done by his father's movement, now dwindled almost to extinction. As it turns out, the sacrifice, which was meant as a sign of strength and indicate the superiority of tradition over colonialism and modernity, in effect ends up ironically symbolizing its reverse, the death of tradition over modernity and the move away from a colonial world. In this sense the slaying of Tamango also symbolizes the emergence of the mimic man, that is the ascendancy of people like Ralph into future positions of power.

The societal divisions in *The Mimic Men* are very similar in *A Casual Brutality*. In the decades after independence, the nation has not been able to create a common sense of belonging, in the sense of Benedict Arnold's *Imagined Communities*, and the props of nation are in decay with some groups turning violent. In contrast with *The Mimic Men*, however, the divisions have evolved over the years and now are manifest mainly in a conflict between a new middle class and a growing urban poor.

This is made apparent early in the novel, when armed soldiers bring a beaten-up mechanic from the gas station across the street to Raj's office for some quick care. Just moments earlier, Raj had been contemplating the station from behind the Venetian blinds of his office. There, with the midday sun dazzling, from behind the burglar-proof grille he had "observed the pantomime of automotive service," the "unfurling of gas-pump hoses", the "sauntering nonchalance of attendants" (CB, 22). And as he observed this procession, in a Marlowian gaze, Raj found himself "envying the simplicity of the activity" (CB, 22).

> Two mechanics, stripped to their waists, one in shorts, the other in baggy jeans that seemed on the verge of falling to his ankles, shambled from the shadowed background, glanced up at the exposed underbelly of the car, gestured with indifference, spoke briefly to each other. Then, shambling still, with limbs so loose I could hear them rattling in my head, they retreated to the shadows from which they had come. (CB, 23)

Raj recognizes he had met the mechanic just some days earlier at the gas station when the mechanic, "wrench held casually in his grease-smeared right hand" (23), had asked Raj to help him out with some money for a drink. Raj, not a man to give something for nothing, refuses to which the man, glares with "clenched teeth," and says: "You must remember people watchin' you" (CB, 23).

> I had been momentarily thrown by the threat, by its indirectness, by the almost sophisticated wording that seemed to offer warning rather than to promise violence. But, of course, that was what had been intended: a veiled promise of violence delivered with carefully weighed calculation, an offering softly spoken of a casual brutality. Understanding, I began to see the threat as an expression of failure; a dollar would have brought off his anger.

The men in uniform had beaten the man to a condition where he is visibly in need of greater care, and Raj's plea to the leader of the soldiers, who Raj recognizes as a former classmate, is to no avail and he is told to simply do a patch-up job. Raj's irritation causes him to retort in the island dialect: "Then he ready to go," which is recognized by both as an instance of condescension, as that was how "we spoke to our maids and yardboys, as if we felt that, with their splintered grammar, they would then understand us" (CB, 27).

As it turns out, Raj later learns that it was this same mechanic who was pictured in the newspaper as having been shot and left for dead by a tree, and that it was his former classmate who had summarily executed him. As the classmate notes to Raj, the mechanic had been a bad character, and the classmate, who saw himself as in the insurance business of protecting the interests of wealthy people like Raj, needed to be eliminated. These tensions, between rich and poor, later play themselves out during the night of revolt, and it is Raj's cousin's coolie (the island term for poor people of Indian descent) who is among the soldiers who go to Raj's house and abduct Raj's wife and son.

Fuelling the island's discord are Raj's privileged middle-class relatives, who, like the colonists before them, have taken on racist attitudes towards the black segment of the population, as well as brute behaviour towards the poor, regardless of race. This narrow-mindedness, Raj tells us, is driven by a primary fear, in that those who had worked their way up from indentured servitude needed to psychologically distance themselves from their past for fear that if they identified with them they would become them. As Raj notes, his kin had grown up with the feeling that some of them "had progressed in the world,"

while yet others, "through laziness" and "lack of initiative" had remained behind, condemned to labour in the same fields as their grandparents (CB, 192). Their villages, "mean and grumbling," scattered through the "cane belt" with the men drinking "cheap rum" keeping their "machetes close at hand," the women "overworked, overbeaten, overreligious," and the children "overdressed, overgreased and undereducated" (CB, 192). Thus, although "a racial brotherhood" was recognized, these "coolies" were seen as "we might have been," which "earned our distrust and contempt" (CB, 192-3).

A Powerless Nation

In addition to the deep divisions existing between different groups in the islands of Isabella and Casaquemada, the politicians are also powerless to bring about fundamental change. The transfer of power was literally just that, a switching of chairs, where nothing changed.

Naipaul's Ralph Singh, as a new cabinet minister, learns quickly that the fledgling nation remains dependent on its former colonial master. It is very difficult to fire British civil servants, as they have the administrative expertise and there are not enough qualified locals to take their place. Similarly, the pillars of the island's economy go on as before. Although Ralph, after some very tough negotiations with British owners, is able to increase the island's bauxite royalties, his attempts to lead the nation into the building of a plastics industry, under a scheme presented by a Czech businessman, ends in dismal failure with the idea's progenitor fleeing the country.

There are also limits as to how far the fledgling nation can dictate its own policies, as made very clear in the episode covering the possible nationalization of the Stockwell sugar estates. Following delegations to London to discuss the matter, and even a brief meeting with the British minister who is rude and dismissive, Ralph is told in unequivocal terms that any nationalization is out of the question, with the repercussions of such a move outlined "clearly and concisely" (MM, 267):

> Nationalization was as impossible as getting rid of the expatriate civil servants; so much London had made clear. A delegation to London was proposed. The expected reply came: there was nothing to discuss. (MM, 262)

Ralph feels compelled to do something, however, as the "disturbance" at the Stockwell sugar estates continues, with "ripe cane" in the fields "waiting to be cut" and

the "loss from arson immense," which, he describes as the "first serious challenge to order we had to face" (MM, 261).

Ralph's political opponents seize on this unrest and accuse him of the "delaying tactics" of a "bribed" man, committed solely "to the fortunes of his race." This has Ralph backed into a corner because the political magazine to which he wrote and which triggered his political career, the Socialist, "against common sense, had continued to proclaim nationalization of the sugar estates as a desirable goal" (MM, 262). Ultimately, the tension and the violence converge within a politics that has become unhinged:

> Nationalization had become a word. It had no meaning. It held only Asiatic threat and Asiatic hope and to some it was a word of fulfilment and to others a word of revenge. Nationalization became less than a word: it became an emotive sound. The sugar-cane fields burned; two or three police stations in the country were overrun; in the towns shops and houses were looted. We were in the midst of a racial disturbance, but we spoke of it as nationalization. (MM, 262-3)

At the height of these tensions Lord Stockwell himself invites Ralph to his mansion for dinner while he is visiting in London. Ralph, is ready for "a full public scene" (MM, 269), but is quickly disarmed, however, as from the moment the butler opens the door, Ralph feels that he is entering a place of exotic splendour, housing the great myths of the Orient and his childhood fantasies, making him forget why he is there:

> I had spent my life in interiors like these. It wiped out, what at that moment it should have sharpened, memories of black mud and red-and-ochre overseers' compounds. The man took my overcoat, folded it and put it on a chair, below a Kalighat painting, momentarily disturbing because so unexpected: Krishna, the blue god, upright, left leg crossed in front of right, flute at his lips, wooing a white milkmaid. (MM, 269)

All through the dinner Ralph feels that he is engaged in a language of which he does not understand the grammar, which is punctuated at the point when Lady Stella, the daughter of Lord Stockwell, asks Ralph about the children's books he had read as a child. As Ralph is mostly oblivious to the titles she asks about, noting merely that "we had 'Pat-a-cake' in one of our readers," she becomes "saddened and unbelieving" (MM, 271). In her opinion, "understanding was impossible between people who had not read the same

children's books or heard the same nursery rhymes" (MM, 271). Lady Stockwell, in continuation, makes Ralph very aware of his mimic condition:

> Lady Stockwell disapproved of the cult of childhood and cult of children's books; it was something else that was being commercialized. She added that it was an exceedingly English thing and that societies like my own, if she could judge from what I had said, were wiser in encouraging children to become adults 'with all due haste.' (MM, 271)

It is this dinner at the Stockwell's and the riots that continue after it that trigger Ralph's walking away from his life as a colonial politician. Gradually, as he observes the events unfold, and sees how easily talk of nationalization has become mired the fuelling of racial tensions and political Machiavellianism, he becomes increasingly aware of the falseness of his position, of being "imprisoned in pretence" (MM, 263). He is aware that he could counter those who were trying to destroy him, to summon forces "to bring about a successful resolution," but his "sense of drama" fails him, and he does not act (MM, 263). Not long after this he is sidelined as a cabinet minister and returns to London as a political refugee. A year and a half later, begins writing his memoirs, in order to start making sense of how mimicry had shaped not just him as a person, but also his island.

The sense of powerlessness described in *The Mimic Men* above is similar in *A Casual Brutality*. The negative forces that took root after independence, as narrated by Naipaul's Ralph and now by Bissoondath's Raj, have reached a culmination point. The way Raj's uncle sees it, the playbook of his island picks up at the very place that Ralph Singh of *The Mimic Men* had left off. He and the new rulers were suddenly bestowed with "all this power" and genuinely believed in the "optimism of the time" that was "electrifying" and that they "could do it" (MM, 200). Just like in Ralph Singh's Isabella, however, the politics very quickly turned sour with so many of the politicians learning the other "darker lessons" that would rule them in the end (CB, 200). The island is now metamorphosed into the quintessential mimic nation:

> We acted like those who had ruled us before. As they exploited us, so we exploited each other. As they raped our land, se we raped our land. As they took, so we took. We had absorbed the attitudes of the colonizer, and we mimicked the worst in him. We learned none of his virtues, grasped at all of his vices. (CB, 213)

At the end of *A Casual Brutality* things have reached a culmination point. The greed and corruption that was born in the years after independence have gained in force, as have the tensions between different groups. As an added element, the island needs to grapple with the vicissitudes of a global oil market that at its latest had seen a plunge in the price of oil. True, the preceding oil boom had delivered prosperity, or rather the promise of prosperity, but the proceeds had been squandered on corruption and lavish lifestyles. Now, as the oil sector can no longer keep the economy afloat, the unrest has reached unmanageable proportions, with the army of the unemployed, fuelled by the politicians, setting fires, looting stores and spreading discord.

Thus, for example, during an evening get-together of Raj's extended family after the riots have started in earnest, Raj's cousin tells of how he and his coolie had narrowly escaped a lynching on that very same day, when a mob had been rummaging and burning just about anything in sight: "Terrible. Hundreds o' nigs in front o' one o' your banks," "wavin' black and red flags and shoutin' for the white man to go home." (CB, 190)

Although he is not happy with the idea, Raj's uncle tells Raj that the solution seems to be calling in the marines. Their island had never been more than a *payol* nation, he surmises, referring to the island's idiom for Latin Americans, and continues: "And if we're *payols*, with *payol* problems, then maybe we need *payol* solutions" (CB, 211). In other words, he is suggesting that their island is nothing more than a small peripheral nation, mimicking Western values and practices, unable to create something on its own.

Raj, a rational man, and educated as a doctor to embrace the best of Enlightenment ideals, finds himself strangely silent at this point. He is only able to utter the words "Grappler, no," when it is already too late as Raj's uncle is already "trudging across the lawn towards the porch" (CB, 213). On the one hand, Raj needs to uphold the values of the Enlightenment and pay lip service to the idea of independence and self-determination because to concede that such values do not apply in a colonial setting would be to call into question the validity of these ideals, universally. On the other hand, Raj has no solution either, and hence the silence.

As such, this calling in of the troops, and Raj's silent protest, speak more widely of the colonial legacy. The colonizers had come, waving banners of the Enlightenment and the civilizing mission, yet behind this façade was a much baser truth. The drive for empire and the extraction of resources to the centre was rooted in slavery and violence and economic gain. The calling in of the troops in *A Casual Brutality* thus amounts to nothing

more than a continuation of colonialism, albeit in a different form. This comes along with an identity that is constructed elsewhere:

> As the island filled in, developed activity in economy, in politics, it failed to solidify into a recognizable entity. We were formed of too many bits and pieces. There were too many things that we were not, too few things that we were. If we could claim identity, it was only in the travel posters that had been done up by a New York advertising agency to promote the island's minimal tourist industry. Only here was there uniformity of vision. Only here was there a sense of stability and calm. Only here were the beaches swept of debris, only here did the sand shine with a pristine brilliance. (CB,

There can be no politics to redress this issue because even these are based on "imported ideologies" (CB, 200). As Raj's uncle tells us, echoing the words of Naipaul's Ralph Singh before him, the intellectuals of his island build their "personalities on other people's ideas, other people's experiences." These are people who "react predictably to any given situation," living their life in "intellectual straightjackets," who do wish to look reality in the face "because if their ideology is challenged so is their sense of self." (CB, 200).

3. Decolonising the Mind

This thesis has investigated mimicry from diverse perspectives. Over the course of the analysis, Naipaul's Ralph Singh and Bissoondath's Raj Ramsingh emerged as quintessential mimic men, taking on Western values, and, in Orientalist fashion, privileging the Western over the non-Western, the core over the periphery.

This privileging was manifest in many ways. Naipaul's Ralph Singh, up to the time when he was a colonial politician, felt a lack and as a result created a series of roles for himself: colonial dandy, cosmopolitan businessman, and finally colonial politician with leftist leanings. Bissoondath's Raj, on the other hand, early in childhood adopted the identity of a rational man driven by Enlightenment values, if only later to discover Hume's dictum that reason is just a slave of the passions as he returned to his island to act like the colonizers before him. There was in our protagonists a growth into self-awareness and how the forces of the colonial legacy had affected them, thereby paving the way for a life liberated from this bad faith.

With Naipaul's Ralph this growth into awareness was a more drawn out process. Although Ralph had an intimation of what might be his authentic self before he sat down to write, it was the process of writing that opened the floodgates. Thus, already when a child, when he made the transition from a nervous boy to a cricketer, he had experienced some freeness of character in sports. Similarly, upon his return to the island and succeeding in business and then as a politician, Ralph similarly felt a sense of liberation, of engaging with the world. It was not until much later, however, while writing his memoirs in exile, that Ralph started to grow into self-awareness.

Thus, eighteen months after his arrival in London, when the "anaesthetizing order" of his hotel has his "despair and emptiness" burned out, that things finally started to open, and he could take stock of his life in a new light (MM, 291). The process began on the very first day of writing when he had the epiphany of the snow. The recollection opened the path to his psyche, and gradually, over the next year or so, Ralph, and so too us the readers, became increasingly aware of how the colonial past and the concomitant forces of mimicry shaped his life.

At the completion of his memoirs, towards the end of this self-imposed "exile of sorts," Ralph surmises that the events he described in the writing have finally become "historical and manageable," so that they no longer "disturb" him (MM, 292).

> I no longer yearn for ideal landscapes and no longer wish to know the god of the city. This does not strike me as a loss. I feel, instead, I have lived through attachment and freed myself from one cycle of events. It gives me great joy to find that in so doing I have also fulfilled the fourfold division of life prescribed by our Aryan ancestors. I have been student, householder, man of affairs, recluse. (MM, 300)

At just 40 years old, then, Ralph is at a crossroads. In no longer yearning for ideal landscapes or the god of the city, he is no longer seeking a 'centre,' and has freed himself from the cycle of events that made him a mimic man in the service of empire. He also makes a nod to his ancestry by alluding to an alternative narrative of his life, based on the Aryan wisdom. Thus, his life as a 'recluse' has culminated in what we might think of the wisdom of the sage, or alternatively as the shipwrecked colonial ex-politician, stripped of his glory and hiding from the world. Nevertheless, the writing has cleared his mind and he is ready engage with the world:

> I have cleared the decks, as it were, and prepared myself for fresh action. It will be the action of a free man (MM, 300).

What exactly is meant by Ralph's 'clearing of the deck' has been discussed in the literature. Anthony Boxill (1976), for example, is of the opinion that Ralph is able to "transcend the meaningless flux of his bastard worlds" (Boxill, 18) and show to us as readers how "modern man can transcend and be extended by his plastic world" (Boxill, 19). Greenberg (2000) sees "the vitality" that Ralph has acquired through his writing, delivered through "the struggle for knowledge of self and world" (Greenberg, 229). In contrast, Fawzia Mustafa in *V.S. Naipaul* (1995) does not see in Ralph anything that would lead to genuine vision or action, and thus argues that Ralph has gained nothing more than "an existentialist epiphany of marginality through choice" (quoted in Greenberg, 229).

These critics, except for Mustafa, thus emphasize an emancipatory reading. What this tends to ignore, however, is that Ralph's liberation comes at a heavy price. The fall from being a celebrated businessman and a political leader of almost mythical proportions is great indeed. Thus, without a home or a sense of home in either his island or in the West, and without substantial wealth, Ralph has been reduced to the obscurity of a hotel room. As a young boy he used to imagine himself shipwrecked in Isabella, now he is

shipwrecked in the outskirts of London. In this light, Ralph's freeness is ironic. He is a foreigner in a foreign country and his predicament does not sound much like a liberation.

Nevertheless it is certain that he has gained self-knowledge and he is ready for action, even if, in Ralph's own words, some hesitation remains. This readiness is private and pertains solely to self, and by no means aims, as it cannot aim, to fix what is wrong with the colonial legacy. So, we are on the cusp of transcendence, or we are dreaming of transcendence, which in the complex dynamics of postcolonialism is sufficiently emancipatory, and about all that can be hoped for. As Greenberg (2000, 229) argues, what Ralph offers is "not a revolutionary or even barrier-breaking outcome but an honest and original cultural act that provides readers with a deep sense of the West Indian experience." Such a reading would suggest that Ralph has been able to cleanse himself from his mimicry, of privileging the core over the periphery, and that he is able to start a new life unhindered by the past.

Yet one's past, or one's mimicry for that matter, is not that easy to shrug off. Ralph himself stresses that he does not know the future. Thus, thinking of his prospects, he tells us: "I used to think of journalism," "or a job with the UN," but he apparently now realizes that those are jobs for mimics, "attractive only to a harassed man" (MM, 300). Yet immediately afterwards he suggests supposedly better solutions: "I might go into business again. Or I might spend the next ten years working on a history of the British Empire" (MM, 300). This is a curious response, and one that suggests an ironic reading, given that a return to business would simply be a repetition of the past and it is hard to imagine that Ralph's new-found awareness would somehow change things substantially from his earlier life as a real estate developer.

Ralph's thinking about spending ten years writing a history is equally curious. When he was still at the height of his powers, he harboured such a dream, picturing himself as a rustic lord or retired eminence spending his days at work writing while offhandedly overseeing the labourers in an idealized plantation setting. Yet, now, after choosing voluntary exile, and even spending a year and a half writing a version of such a history, he is contemplating a return to the subject with even greater force. So it seems that Ralph has not been that freed of his past, that he is compelled to go on trying to make sense of that history that had such a great impact on his life. In this sense, for Ralph the colonial past and its concomitant mimicry are akin to the abject, like a lost limb whose memory lingers on, always returning to haunt him (cf. McClinton, 1995, 71-74). This, of course, mirrors Naipaul the author, not just in that Ralph's story is also in part about Naipaul

becoming a writer, but also in that Naipaul the author too – time and time again – has returned to writing about the world's half-made societies, in effect making it the defining feature of his oeuvre.

Also, no amount of knowledge or self-awareness will change the fact that for Ralph the world remains as it is. The Lord Stockwells and other colonial masters will continue running their plantations and to regard colonials like Ralph with a certain contempt, as unexotic, servile, there to do the colonists bidding. And it is to be expected that Ralph, to the extent that he wishes to engage with society, will continue to be a mimic man. Still, Ralph can continue to write and gain a better understanding, just as Naipaul the author will go on writing about mimicry and Trinidad and the colonial world. This provides unique insight into the colonial world, but what is offers is merely a diagnosis, not a cure.

Rebirth as the Immigrant Everyman

In *A Casual Brutality*, Raj Ramsingh also becomes aware of his mimicry even though this is not the outcome of a drawn-out process of writing given that Raj completes his memoirs within the span of an airline flight back to Toronto. His growth into self-awareness starts during the short period of his return to the island as an adult and then continues around the calamitous events on the island that see Raj lose his wife and son.

An example of this knowledge and awareness, albeit still tinged with self-blame is shared with us when Raj rides up to the old British fort, and sets to contemplating his hands. They "had helped save no one," had been unsuccessful with his family and indeed his life. These "instruments of apparent possibility" had been nothing more than "finely wrought trappings fashioned solely for display, like handsome, theatrical props of papier-mache" (CB, 364):

> I understood why I had come back, understood that in me too had sprung, without question, the intoxication of the offered evils… No matter how much I talked about doing my bit, about creating the dream, the fact remained that I would not have returned were the money not already there: no matter how much I gave of myself, I would always go away with more. (CB, 367)

Thus, Bissoondath's Raj, just like Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, had merely gone along for the ride, playacting the role of doctor, all the while the nation around him disintegrated. The high Enlightenment ideals that Raj brought back to the island were

powerless as the island's deeply rooted tensions started to unravel. Raj's reaction to all this, like Ralph in *The Mimic Men*, is flight. On the plane, in great pain after his loss, his opening lines deliver a scathing blow to the island of his birth:

> There are times when the word hope is but a synonym for illusion: it is the most virile of perils. He who cannot discern the difference – he whose perception of reality has slipped from him, whose appreciation of honest has withered within him – will face, at the end, a fine levied, with no appeal, with only regret coating the memory like ash. (CB, 1)

What Ralph is telling us here is that his belief or hope regarding his island had only been an illusion, that the hopes of progress and a prosperous future, as presented to us in the travel brochures, masked an underlying reality based on corruption and violence. Raj's failure to realize this fact about his island levied him the greatest price.

But from the failure of the nation arises hope for the person. Up at the British fort, where Raj had decried his condemnation of the colonial project and his own complicity in it, just before he falls asleep from exhaustion, in the darkness, he has the thought: "I have spent my life polishing shadows. It was the only truth, in that moment of extinction, that occurred to me" (CB, 370). He then symbolically awakens to a new dawn and begins his "slow descent into the town, towards its restless and fitful slumber, towards its drama of splinter and crash" (CB, 370). At this moment, for all the downplaying of Hindu tradition, he knows what needs to be done next. "There were cremations to be done. Thus would begin the expiation" (CB, 371).

The cremation itself is an elaborate ritual with kin of all sorts present, unknown by Raj, as the pundits meticulously instruct him ahead. Raj knows that as a modern man he has gone too far, and "wants no part" of the "superstitions" of his forefathers (CB, 376). Although he feels "strangely cleansed" and appreciates the "purification of fire," the other aspects of the ritual "are of darknesses too remote", "of a past that has formed, but does not inform" him (CB, 377).

And so Raj will move on. Towards the end of writing his memoirs, he begins to see his journey from the perspective of a greater migration. "What began so long ago as flight from a dusty and decrepit village in India," he tells us, "brings me now to a flight on a jet blasting its way through a cool Canadian night to the newest destination of highways and high rises" (CB, 377). He is now reborn as the immigrant everyman:

> I go, like my forebears, to the future, to the challenge that lies elsewhere of turning nothing into something, far from the casual brutality of collapse, far from the ruins of failure, across thousands of miles of ocean…So it has been. So it is. So it will remain. (CB, 378)

And with these closing lines to his memoirs Raj brings his experience full circle, the lines looping back to the beginning, as Raj's plane hits the tarmac in Toronto, exhaling "as in relief" (CB, 377). Whereas Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* had laboured a whole of eighteen months in his hotel in London, meticulously trying to make sense of self and past, Raj Ramsingh, more a creature of our time, has managed to tell his tale within his flight from his island to Canada. His is ready to take an ontological leap, unhindered by mimicry, to an open future. His task is to turn "nothing into something", in a life where "much has been jettisoned, much has been lost," but "the important thing is to keep moving on" (CB, 377).

Mimicry and its Explanatory Power

At this point, it is worth asking whether our protagonists provide a fair assessment of mimicry in so far as it affected their lives and islands. As has been covered so far in this thesis, this concept is laden with a lot of explanatory power.

This is partly so because mimicry has been shown to both a psychological and societal phenomenon. Our values and actions are shaped by society, and through our values and actions we shape society in turn. In the case of our two protagonists, their mimicry, or false sense of self, resulted in inappropriate actions, and extending this to greater society, we can see how the mimicry within a population easily leads to a nation's disarray.

Thus, in the case of Naipaul's Ralph Singh, the feelings of inadequacy and extinction that mimicry had instilled in him led to the playacting of inauthentic roles, to his womanizing and his inability to form a genuine relationship with his wife. In the case of Bissoondath's Raj Ramsingh, his childhood experiences of the island's divisions in no small measure led to create for himself the persona of the detached, rational man, which, in the end, failed to protect him from island violence. Thus, through the time of our protagonists, spanning from the 1930s through to the 1980s, the deep divisions and tensions of the island, resulting from a troubled past, continued to shape island attitudes, which in turn reinforced these divisions and tensions in a continuous feedback loop.

The assessments made by Ralph and Raj, that the disarray of their islands is the result of a combination of the colonial legacy and its concomitant mimicry, can be thought of

in terms of the schematic introduced by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*. On the one hand, Said argues, there are those who would prefer to see the continuing dependence of the developing world as the result of "self-inflicted" wounds, where we need to acknowledge that the newly independent nations "are to blame for what 'they' are, and it's no use droning about the legacy of imperialism" (Said, 20). On the other hand, he continues, "blaming the Europeans sweepingly for the misfortunes of the present is not much of an alternative" (Said, 20).

What Said is saying is that you cannot ascribe blame in a polarized fashion, that it's the fault of either the newly independent nation or the colonial legacy. However, within the framework of mimicry, if we think of it as covering both realms due to its feedback loop, the concept is thus laden with a great deal of explanatory power. Thus, if we were to ask what's wrong with the developing nation, accepted notions of mimicry lead us to unequivocally say 'mimicry.'

As has been argued by Rob Nixon (1992), in his analysis of Naipaul's non-fiction oeuvre, mimicry is reduced to a portmanteau concept, as the reason for all that ails the developing world, that is lack of innovation, underdevelopment, dependency and so on. As Nixon sees it, such an understanding of mimicry puts under erasure other approaches.

The problem, as Nixon sees it, is that Naipaul does not take his analysis far enough. As has been done by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Nixon argues, Naipaul the non-fiction writer should fuse his psychological understanding of neo-colonialism with an economic understanding of the same process. What Nixon is saying, then, is that Naipaul's use of mimicry as an explanatory concept, with its offhand evocations of derivativeness, unoriginality and so on, does not sufficiently consider the economic and cultural impacts of neo-colonialism.

This, according to Nixon, reduces mimicry to a spatial concept, where it is conceived of "as a function of geographical psychology – how people behave when they feel marginal – rather than addressing psychological questions in tandem with economic ones" (Nixon, 142). Thus, the world is divided between the "far-off, alluring world of producers" and the "immediate, insubstantial, nondescript world of borrowers and copiers" (Nixon, 130). Peripheral mimic societies are "half-made," of "imitative dependency," where the mimics "have learned the security of living off the creativeness of others" (Nixon, 131). As such, in Nixon's reading, mimicry "wavers between an explanation and an accusation" (Nixon, 131), where Naipaul "blames the victim" by "intimating that colonized people wanted their subjection" (Nixon, 143).

Such a reading of Naipaul's mimicry, it would seem, is overly polemical, even if limited to Nixon's focus on Naipaul's non-fiction. Indeed, what we have found in our analysis of *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality* is a much more refined reading. The psychology of mimicry in the novels, and in the protagonists, was found to be very much in the tradition of writers like Said, Fanon, Bhabha, involving a much more nuanced take on the core-periphery Manicheanism.

I would argue that neither Naipaul nor Bissoondath shy away from "other" explanatory factors in their analysis of the woes of their peripheral islands. Both were found to be very sensitive in pointing out the lingering legacy of colonialism in the life of the islands, by no means simply blaming the victim, and by no means neglecting to address the wider implications of neo-colonialism on culture and economics.

Thus, Naipaul's Ralph Singh, we learned, quite expertly summed up the economic dilemmas of his island by, among other things, discussing the difficulty of the new government had in renegotiating the bauxite royalties, in describing the technology gap in affairs of state and the attempt to give birth to new industry, and as a nail in the coffin to Ralph's political fortunes, the power play by the British government to make clear that there will be no nationalization of the sugar estates. The point was sufficiently made without a need to delve into the intricacies of Marxist or dependency theory, as one would expect in a fictional work.

Similarly, even though Bissoondath's Raj Ramsingh does not address the economy in any explicit sense, he did ironically draw attention to the island's imported tastes as well as the island's fundamental uncertainty, where anyone who can prepares to leave at a moment's notice. More importantly, however, the rise and the fall in the price of oil, although merely in the background in the novel, was clearly shown to be the root of the island's violence, revealing the island as a pawn within a neoliberal world order, where the impersonal forces of global markets can very quickly cause great havoc on a small island nation.

The issue of whether mimicry explains too much or too little, then, is a matter of what we take the term to encompass. Should we include the economic dimension, and have mimicry encompass the impersonal forces of global capital? In a similar vein, should we take mimicry to include the legacy of colonialism, in the sense of including the underlying racial and ethnic tensions that remain in the islands of Naipaul's Isabella and Bissoondath's Casaquemada? To my mind such agglomerations easily make things too complex.

Pessimism and Hope

Whatever choice one makes regarding the domain of mimicry in the context of the peripheral nation, it remains the case that both *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality* are profoundly pessimistic.

Although there are redeeming qualities in the growth of our protagonists, in that they become free of the forces of mimicry and anticipate a new life, if still undefined, they both share a profoundly despairing view of their respective home islands. As Ralph Singh of *The Mimic Men* leaves his island for the final time, it has already begun its downward spiral, which, by the time of Raj Ramsingh of *A Casual Brutality*, has reached its culmination.

Perhaps fittingly, now that we live in a world wary of grand narratives, neither protagonist is able to give an unequivocal explanation of their island's ailment. Instead, we are provided with a series of particulars, each opening in us a deeper sense of the troubles faced by a West Indian island nation. There is the psychology of mimicry, there are the deep divisions in race and class, and there is the economic dependency.

In a sense, as has been argued by Said about Conrad's Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* (*Culture and Imperialism*, 24-29), our protagonists are mimic men who are sufficiently on the outside to be able to observe with precision the workings of their mimic societies, yet nevertheless too much on the inside, within the Western way of seeing things, to be able to fathom an alternative. Thus, the journey of our protagonists is like that of Marlow where they provide us with acute perceptions of the mimics, the corrupt politicians, and the greed, while the "other" of this world, that is the natives and other visions, are left voiceless, silent.

Thus, Naipaul's Ralph Singh, aside from generalised descriptions of the distress of the poor, does not include in his narrative any 'native' with a voice. There is only Ralph's cousin's sidekick, who is referred to only as "the Negro" (MM, 192). He just about never speaks, and immediately complies with his master's orders. Failure on this front, it can be argued, is a failure to adequately address the condition of the mimic man, in that his identity, just like the colonizer's, is to a great extent defined by his Other.

This division is not quite as pronounced in the case of Bissoondath's Raj Ramsingh, but even here little is known of the poor beyond the protagonist's gaze. Thus, the young Raj knows nothing of where Wayne, the yardboy, goes after he is done working in the garden or in Raj's grandfather store. Mirroring *The Mimic Men*, Raj's cousin also has his

own sidekick, who is there simply to obey his master and not speak unless prompted by his master to do so.

A mark for the better occurs towards the end of *A Casual Brutality*, when Raj as an adult reconnects with Wayne to a certain extent, and they enter a series of conversations. Indeed, the Bakhtinian dialogue that ensues offers to the reader some of the deepest insights to the condition of those other people on the island who live beyond the comfort of Raj's and his extended family's middle-class lifestyle. Considering these deep divisions, it is not surprising that during the night of mayhem, it is the voiceless 'coolie' Lenny that is seen coming with the soldiers to abduct Raj's wife and son.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned limitations of our protagonists, *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual* Brutality offer a unique view of life in a West Indian island like Trinidad over a period spanning from the from the colonial 1930s through to the early 1980s. That our protagonists provide us as readers their insights does not mean that they have all the answers. As readers we find that the plight of the mimic nation remains somewhat shrouded in mystery, an agglomeration of historical exigencies, mimic psychologies and neo-colonial structures.

And if our protagonists lack vision, as has been the stock criticism of mimicry among many authors, there remains the hope that their growing awareness points to a more fulfilling future, both as individuals and contributors to society. As readers we too have been introduced to the complex dynamics of mimicry in the developing world, and how it continues, along with economic imperatives and the legacy of colonialism to shape the future. If we perceive of mimicry as confining, it is up to us, to the extent that we share similar thought processes, to strive to break free from them, given that the impact of the colonial legacy, just like mimicry, is ultimately shaped by our state of mind.

5. In Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the concept of mimicry from diverse perspectives in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality*. Drawing on the ideas of postcolonial theorists, we saw how mimicry had a profound impact on the personal lives of the protagonists, their relationships, and their island nations. On part of the protagonists, this was marked by a psychology of inauthenticity and associated feelings of lack and inadequacy that arose because of a colonial education and the inability to feel a sense of home either in the island of one's birth or in Toronto or London.

Thus Naipaul's Ralph, the extrovert, took on the role of the colonial dandy and started womanizing as a defence against the feelings of lack and irrelevance and intrusion in his life. In contrast, more introverted Raj in Bissondath's novel grew up to be the rational man, choosing to become a doctor in order to escape from his island, while living essentially in isolation and disengagement from personal relationships. Both Ralph and Raj had dysfunctional marriages, where the wives emerged as two mimics in their own right. Their story was also that of the colonial legacy, of how it gave birth to the mimic man, and how the legacy continued to have an impact long after colonists had gone.

We saw how both protagonists started to write and find a sense of self as they became aware of their mimicry and the impact that it had on their lives. Thus, at the end of his memoirs, Naipaul's Ralph emerged from his hotel room ready to face life anew as a "free man," although he did not yet know what he would do in the future. Similarly, on the plane back to Canada, Bissoondath's Raj was ready to leave the past behind and re-emerge as the immigrant everyman, equipped with the portability of profession he wisely chose as a young man.

As discussed in chapter three, Ralph's declaration of freeness at the end of the novel has led some critics to see a glimmer of hope for him in the future, seeing in him a new found "vitality" (Greenberg, 200, 229) and the ability to "transcend the meaningless flux of his bastard worlds" (Boxill, 1976, 18). What such readings put on hold, however, is that Naipaul's protagonist pays a heavy price for refusing to play the racial card as a colonial politician, and is thereby cast from shipwreck to shipwreck, ending up in the obscurity of a London hotel room. For Bissoondath's Raj, who loses his wife and son in the turmoil of Casaquemada, the price paid is even higher.

Although Naipaul's Ralph certainly acquires self-knowledge and becomes keenly aware of his mimicry, it does not follow that his year-and-a-half-long writing period is in

any sense cathartic, i.e. that he would have emerge freed of his mimicry and untainted by the past. The way he sees it, his options might be to get a mimic job as a journalist or at the UN, or spend the next ten years writing the history of the British Empire. The irony is therefore that Ralph is compelled return to the very topic that he thought he had written out of his system. Bissoondath's Raj, too, might have expiated himself and prepared for a new life, but that too is marked by a deeply troubling memory of his past, and a keen awareness of his migrant status. He thus envisions himself as continuing the diasporic journey begun by his ancestors from India across the middle passage to the Caribbean, once again the immigrant everyman moving towards a future that is always uncertain.

Still, as their narratives criss-cross between Isabella and London, and between Casaquemada and Toronto, we are provided with what Edward Said calls "a contrapuntal vision" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 78-9), with each new location perceived from the perspective of the former. This provides to us as readers a unique journey through the acculturation into mimicry, its effects and its ultimate renunciation from the 1930s through to the early 1980s, a period during which British hegemony in the Caribbean was largely replaced by the U.S. Illuminating as this is to the reader, it should be borne in mind that what is provided is a diagnosis, not a cure.

At a writers' conference in India in 2006, V.S. Naipaul quipped: "Why do you keep drumming up the issue of colonialism?" (Press Trust of India, 2006). The way Naipaul saw it, India had been independent for more than 50 years, and writers ought to stop dwelling on the topic. Yet the fact remains that if we make a roll call of today's failed states we will find that they continue to be deeply mired in the colonial legacy. The newspapers continue to tell us about the economic breakdowns and coup-de-tats, about the corruption and the dependency and the racial tension still so prevalent in the developing world. The legacy is also apparent in what at first appear to be minor storylines. Just recently, for example, it was reported how it was only a few years ago that the British government stopped paying reparations for slavery, that is to the former slave owners (Gentleman, 2018). At the time of this writing, circulating in the media is the story of how Caribbean immigrants who arrived in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s are being treated as illegals by the British government (*New York Times*, 2018). In the words of Naipaul's own fictional character Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men*, the period of colonialism was short, yet it transformed the world in a fundamental way. This was true in the 1960s just as it remains true today. Because mimicry is a contributing factor to these developments, I believe it deserves our continued attention.

In *The Mimic Man* and *A Casual Brutality* mimicry is a destructive force. The prognosis for the mimic self and nation is not good. Yet, as has been argued by Derek Walcott (1974, 3-13), mimicry can also be thought of as the very basis of creativity. Those hallmarks of Caribbean experience such as the carnival, its costumes and the calypso all have their root in imitation, having emerged from an adaptation specific to the local culture, whether from the banning of African drumming or impromptu improvising. The colonial experience might have wiped out history in the West Indies, he continues, but the point is that culture moves on and adapts to the surroundings and creates the new. If the protagonists and their wives in *The Mimic Men* and *A Casual Brutality* were not able to envision a creative response, this aspect of mimicry – which perhaps properly spills over into the notion of hybridity – remains worth looking into in a postcolonial setting.

The world has also changed. Where Naipaul's Ralph made his trip to London by ship, and Bissoondath's Raj his by plane, today's border crossings are made with a tap of the keyboard. Today the West is both everywhere and nowhere at the same time. New cultural forms of cultural hybridity are replacing established ways of doing things even while in some parts of the world the oldest of traditions live on. And whereas in the West all kinds of essentialism have been effectively deconstructed by the critics, and where identity is increasingly viewed as a construction, some societies still live within the binds of traditional roles. Within this context, it should be asked in what sense mimicry has changed from the times of Naipaul's Ralph and Bissoondath's Raj, and, indeed, how the study of mimicry should be altered in the context of a globalized world. Perhaps this line of inquiry is worth pursuing in future research.

Still, as I hope has been shown, the concept of mimicry, in tandem with ideas from postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Franz Fanon, has proven itself as a versatile tool by which to approach the two novels studied in this thesis. Furthermore, as was discussed in the section on gender, the introduction of categories such as gender and class into the analysis of mimicry opens new avenues for research, and so it can very well be argued that the notion of mimicry has by no means exhausted itself in the academic sense.

The question of mimicry is also deeply entangled in the ethics of the Other. Upon meeting the unknown peoples of the New World, the first colonists were not able to muster a genuine encounter. These first points of contact, of course, led to the birth of the mimic man and the desire for that 'reformed, recognizable Other' who was 'almost the same, but not quite.' Today, as we see unprecedented migrations of people around the

world, the big question is whether creative or destructive forces will prevail. As with Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* and Raj Ramsingh in *A Casual Brutality*, we do not know what routes will be taken. But we do know that the choices made will shape the future.

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